

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1314

May 7, 2014

Representative Tim Murphy
Chairman, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
Committee on Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman,

I was so pleased to see the House Energy and Commerce Committee's Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations begin to examine the heroin epidemic and growing level of prescription painkiller abuse in our nation. Your leadership on this issue is very important to me and the people of my district and the State of Illinois.

My state has been particularly hard hit with opioid abuse. I have been working hard with citizens of my district and the Chicagoland area for some months now. I believe my findings and the contributions of many experts from different backgrounds and perspectives in my district are valuable to your investigatory process and will help build the record. I sincerely appreciate the ability to submit to you an official report and draft action plan for you and your members to take into consideration in the coming weeks. Action must be taken now on many fronts to protect and preserve our communities.

On March 7, 2014, I convened a Community Leadership Forum on Heroin Prevention at the Kane County Government Center in Geneva, Illinois. This timely forum brought together a diverse array of experts and local and state leaders—including law enforcement, drug courts, elected officials, educators, treatment providers and recovery centers—to share resources and ideas to tackle the growing threat of heroin addiction and opioid abuse in northern Illinois. Participants represented all seven of the collar counties, including Lake, McHenry, Kane, DuPage, Kendall, DeKalb and Will counties. These “collar counties” make up the suburban area of the city of Chicago.

At the forum, we came together as a single community to exchange ideas about what is working, what needs improvement and how our combined resources can be a force multiplier in fighting the growing epidemic in our communities. My goal was to create a collaborative environment where participants would share information, discuss concerns and recommend strategic initiatives that leadership can implement to combat the heroin epidemic in our communities.

According to HHS, Americans above age 12 who used heroin rose from 373,000 in 2007 to 669,000 in 2012. In fact, more people are using it than at any time since the 1970s.

And 80 percent of heroin addicts are younger than 26. Most of the Chicago collar counties have seen dramatic increases in heroin-related deaths in the past decade, and the number continues to grow nationwide. In 2013, DuPage County reported a record of 46 deaths and Kane County reported 22—with 12 more already reported this year. Since 2007, 175 people have died in Will County. This is right here in our backyard, and it will take the entire community to face it head-on and stop this epidemic.

Last year, Ken Chiakas suffered a terrible tragedy: his daughter, 17-year old Stephanie, died of a heroin overdose. His shock still lingers as he mourns her death following a sleep-over at a friend's house. His story, told to me and countless others across Illinois' 14th Congressional District, is unfortunately not unique. Ken is very invested in seeing the community organize itself to combat abuse and support efforts for ongoing recovery.

I present this summary of the forum and a draft action document based on the recommendations of the discussion groups to provide a template for a community-based model that can be replicated across the country.

This is not a finished product, but is a valuable tool and the next step toward driving the community to action. I have received additional input from the community and I plan to convene community leaders again to finalize a plan that breaks down barriers and makes a lasting impact for the good.

Many have been touched directly by heroin or opioid addiction, or know someone who has. We need to help spread awareness and encourage our neighbors and friends to get involved. We need to remove the stigma of addiction so those caught in its trap come forward for help.

I hope this draft action plan assists in that process as you examine the growing problems of prescription drug and heroin abuse.

Once again, I greatly appreciate your leadership on this issue and hope that the Subcommittee will move with haste to address the problems that can be fixed through the legislative process. I stand ready to assist you.

Sincerely,


Randall M. Hultgren
Congressman