



**Opening Statement of Rep. Todd Rokita (R-IN)
Chairman, Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education
Joint Subcommittee Hearing on "Close to Home: How Opioids are Impacting Communities"**

The opioid crisis is having a profound impact on families, jobs, communities, and the economy, and that is why we're here today.

The issue of drug overdoses due to opioids is only getting worse as deaths related to opioids have quadrupled since 1999. In 2016 alone, there were approximately 64,000 drug overdoses. This means that the opioid crisis is claiming the lives of 175 Americans per day.

These figures are horrifying and sad not only for the country's future, but for communities who are losing parents, husbands, wives, teachers, and students.

Additionally, the opioid epidemic knows no age, gender, educational credential, or class distinction. This crisis is touching all Americans.

Some of the most unfortunate stories have to do with the children whose lives have been forever changed by this public health emergency.

Between 2000 and 2014, the number of babies born drug-dependent increased by 500 percent. In my home state of Indiana, a recent pilot program from the state Department of Health found that about 1 in 5 infants assessed at hospitals around the state tested positive for opiates.

More and more children are being placed into foster care or are cared for by another relative due to parental drug abuse. According to a recent analysis, nearly a third of the children who entered foster care in the U.S. in 2015 did so at least partially because of parental drug abuse.

It is one thing to read the statistics and accounts in the news about communities in the midst of the opioid crisis, but these accounts do not compare to the real voices we need to hear from in order to understand this crisis.

I had the opportunity to host a school safety summit last week in my district. One of the two big topics was the opioid crisis. I heard from Dustin Noonkester, one of the founders of "Brady's Hope." Dustin lost his son to opioid overdose. This organization is a resource to members of the community on how to spot abuse, how to address opioid misuse, and how families can help one another treat opioid addiction.

These are the stories that give me hope that this crisis can be overcome.

This epidemic can no longer be ignored, and it is important that we hear from those who are on the ground and facing the tragic truths of the opioid crisis every day.

(More)

The witnesses we have gathered here today understand the opioid problem better than any of us here in Washington, because they see it, and fight it, in their communities.

I am pleased this committee can come together to understand this true public health emergency and its impact on communities across the United States.

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