



Opening Statement of Rep. Bradley Byrne (R-AL), Chairman, Subcommittee on Workforce Protections Joint Subcommittee Hearing on “The Opioids Epidemic: Implications for America's Workplaces”

Good morning, and thank you Chairman Walberg for beginning today's joint subcommittee hearing.

I'm pleased to be joining our witnesses and members of both subcommittees as we continue the discussion on the impact the opioid epidemic is having on American communities and workplaces.

The alarming increase in the abuse and misuse of opioids is a matter of great national concern, and I am pleased that Congress and the private sector are having these discussions and actively looking for ways to reverse the damage of opioids in our communities.

One of the most alarming aspects of this epidemic is that misuse and abuse of opioids can happen so quickly, and often begins with prescription medication.

My home state of Alabama is not immune from this troubling development. Alabama ranks first in the nation in the number of painkiller prescriptions per capita, with more than 5.8 million opioid prescriptions written in 2015. That's more than 1.2 prescriptions per person.

An unfortunate reality is that this epidemic is happening to our coworkers, and in business communities large and small. Employers and employees alike are seeing the personal and economic toll this epidemic is having.

Only now are we grasping the tragic statistics that illustrate the impact this problem is having on the American workforce. According to one recent estimate, opioid abuse costs employers \$18 billion per year in sick days and medical expenses.

It is troubling to hear that workplaces around the country have been affected by opioid misuse and addiction. But increased costs are not the most troubling way this epidemic has impacted the workplace. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the number of overdose fatalities on the job has increased by at least 25 percent annually since 2012.

These facts are alarming because they show that employees who abuse drugs, like opioids, are creating unintended consequences for their fellow coworkers.

(More)

Those who misuse any illicit substance while at work are creating a risky environment, and that can also lead to workplace incidents where other employees could be hurt on the job.

Employers are recognizing the risks that opioid abuse has on the workplace, and it is reassuring to hear that businesses large and small are taking steps to address this problem in their organizations.

It is encouraging to hear that more employers are looking for ways to identify, educate, and assist employees who struggle with opioid abuse and addiction. Employee Assistance Programs are a great tool to help employees get the resources they need to start on the road to recovery. I do believe more can and should be done to make employees more aware of these resources before it is too late.

Employers and fellow coworkers play a pivotal role in keeping workplaces safe across the country. I join my colleagues in cautioning the federal government from taking broad and sweeping action to create unnecessary bureaucratic mandates that would inhibit employers who know what programs work best for their individual employees.

Our witnesses today have proven that they are uniquely positioned to tell us more about how companies are adopting and executing new best practices to combat this tragic epidemic in our communities. I would like to thank the witnesses for sharing their stories about how the opioid epidemic affects the workplace, as well as what they are doing to help solve this problem.

Working together with government, businesses, nonprofits, and local communities, I am hopeful we can bring an end to the opioid epidemic.

###