

**TESTIMONY AS PREPARED
OHIO ATTORNEY GENERAL MIKE DEWINE
U.S. CONGRESS JOINT ECONOMIC COMMITTEE
WASHINGTON, DC
JUNE 8, 2017**

Thank you, Chairman Tiberi, Vice Chairman Lee, and Ranking Member Heinrich for inviting me to testify at this very important hearing today on the opioid epidemic in Ohio.

Ohio is facing the worst public health crisis in our lifetime, leading the nation in opioid overdose deaths. In 2015, 85 percent of all accidental drug overdose deaths in Ohio were caused by an opioid. According to new data recently released by the *Columbus Dispatch*, 4,169 Ohioans died from accidental drug overdoses last year -- that's a 36% increase over 2015.

Cuyahoga County Medical Examiner Dr. Thomas Gilson recently testified in front of a U.S. Senate Committee that those who are addicted to drugs in Cuyahoga County, which includes the City of Cleveland and suburbs, would fill the First Energy Stadium where the Cleveland Browns play (73,000-plus), and those who switch to fentanyl each year would fill the Quicken Loans arena, Home of the 2016 world champion Cleveland Cavaliers (20,000-plus).

We are seeing this scourge in the Ohio crime lab. In 2010, the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI) had only 34 cases of Fentanyl, but in 2016, we had 2,396 cases. In fact, more fentanyl came through BCI in 2016 than had come through in the previous five years combined. And BCI went from zero cases of carfentiniil -- an elephant tranquilizer -- in 2015 to 214 cases in 2016. Our organized crime drug task forces have already seized more fentanyl in 5 months of 2017 (30.8 pounds seized) than in all of 2016 (27 pounds).

Four out of five individuals now suffering from heroin or fentanyl addiction first started down this road by using prescription opioids. In 2010, when I first ran for Attorney General, my wife Fran and I both learned of the families who were ravaged by addiction to prescription pain meds and the pill mills that were fueling it, especially in southern Ohio. When I took office, we started going after the doctors who overprescribe these painkillers. Since that time, we have revoked the licenses of 90 doctors and 22 pharmacists.

Last week, my office filed a lawsuit against five of the leading prescription opioid manufacturers and their related companies in the Ross County Court of Common Pleas. The lawsuit alleges that these drug companies engaged in fraudulent, deceptive marketing campaigns about the risks and benefits of prescription opioids, leading doctors to believe that opioids were not addictive, that addiction was an easy thing to overcome, and that addiction could actually be treated by taking even more opioids. As a result, we believe the evidence will show that these companies got thousands and thousands of Ohioans addicted to opioid pain medications, which has all too often led to use of the cheaper alternatives of heroin and synthetic opioids.

This lawsuit is about accountability. It should not be looked at as a substitute for the many things we now must do to battle addiction -- nor should it be looked at as a quick fix. That's why my office is taking a holistic approach to combat the problem.

We must continue our efforts to go after drug dealers. We must continue our outreach work with local communities. And, we must implement our recommendations for early drug abuse prevention education in schools.

In 2013, we established a heroin unit in my office that includes lawyers, investigators, and community outreach liaisons. They fight the opioid battle on both the law enforcement side and on the community outreach side. Our community outreach team works on grassroots efforts, that include bringing together law enforcement, schools, clergy, business leaders, and other citizens to help form a plan specific to that community to address the drug problem. This team helps communities identify needs and recommends resources to address those needs. And, earlier this year, we held an opiate conference in Columbus, with over 1,300 people in attendance, about the opioid crisis and talk about efforts that are working across Ohio to help families and communities.

To make a real difference in this fight we also need to teach our kids early about the dangers of drug use and how to make good decisions. In the 1980s, I served on President Reagan's National Commission on Drug Free Schools. The experts we talked to told us that repetitive, comprehensive, school-based education was necessary to successfully combat drug addiction.

I have often said that there has been a cultural shift in the wrong direction in how our society views drug abuse. The psychological barrier that once stood in the way of someone taking deadly drugs is simply gone. To address this, the Speaker of the Ohio House Cliff Rosenberger and the former Ohio Senate President Keith Faber and I convened a group of experts on education and drug prevention. They recently issued 15 recommendations, including the need for consistent, age-appropriate, evidence-based drug abuse prevention education in Kindergarten through 12th Grade. The recommendations are not mandates. However, if progress is not made, we must ensure communities are instituting prevention efforts to reach youth before it's too late.

Further, if we are serious about changing the culture around substance abuse, we must engage the best and brightest in the private and public sectors to create a statewide anti-drug campaign. We can change the public mind-set through messaging on social media, television, and other mediums.

Local law enforcement is doing some great things, and we need to replicate efforts that work -- programs like Lucas County's Drug Abuse Response Team, created to help addicts navigate the treatment system. What's unique about this program is that law enforcement officers develop personal relationships with addicts, investing both time and compassion.

Ultimately, breaking free from addiction in the long-term requires access to services across a continuum of care -- a holistic, wrap-around approach from overdose to sobriety. Most Ohio

counties have gaps in that continuum, and we must address the different needs of each local community.

Tragically, children and babies are the silent victims of this epidemic. Babies born with neonatal abstinence syndrome because their moms were addicts spent approximately 26,000 days in Ohio hospitals in 2014, with health care costs totaling \$105 million. And our foster care system is overflowing with kids. At least 50% of kids and 70% of infants placed in Ohio's foster care system have parents with opiate addictions, costing the State an estimated \$45 million per year.

My office is funding an innovative new pilot program in 19 southern Ohio counties called START that increases resources to children's services agencies for intensive attention for both children and parents to promote recovery and family reunification. We hope to be able to expand this program to every county in Ohio.

The opioid epidemic is a human tragedy of epic proportion. No doubt the human toll would be much greater, though, but for the life-saving effect of the drug Naloxone, which reverses overdoses. I've been very supportive of expanding access to naloxone for first responders. Naloxone was administered at least 74,000 times in Ohio between 2003 and 2012. In 2014, alone, EMS treated 12,847 overdose patients with Naloxone.

I'm pleased to report that we've renewed our agreement with Amphastar Pharmaceuticals, Inc. -- a manufacturer of Naloxone -- to provide rebates to consumers, such as police departments and other non-federal government agencies that distribute the drug in Ohio. So far, 117 Ohio agencies have applied for a total of \$539,986.00 in rebates over the past two years. Also, Adapt Pharma worked with my staff and agreed to freeze the Public Interest Price over the next year for its Naloxone nasal spray for Ohio.

In 2015, the law changed in Ohio to allow pharmacies to sell Naloxone over the counter without a prescription. Since then, we worked with several Ohio retail stores, including CVS, Kroger, and Walgreens, who have agreed to sell Naloxone. This also will help families and friends who know someone who is addicted by letting them keep this life-saving medication on-hand.

My office will continue to support families, schools, law enforcement, the faith-based community, and others to bring hope and healing to those who struggle with substance abuse and addiction. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I'm honored to be here with the other witnesses and have the opportunity to hear about their good work.

I'm happy to answer any questions at this time.