

**Opening Statement**  
**Senator Bob Casey, Ranking Member**  
**“Grandparents to the Rescue: Raising Grandchildren in the Opioid Crisis and Beyond”**

Thank you, Chairman Collins and thanks for getting us started on this important issue. I want to thank the Chairman for calling this hearing. As you just indicated, today’s topic is a challenging one, and that’s an understatement. It is one that we both see first-hand back home. And, it is one that motivates us when we are here in Washington to focus on this issue and to tackle the problem.

Grandparents Ann Sinsheimer and Marvin Sirbu joined me at my opioid abuse summit recently in Pittsburgh. As you will hear from them shortly, they are raising their grandchildren because their daughter is struggling with an opioid addiction. Ann and Marvin are here with us today. Ann and Marvin, thank you for joining us today and for giving a voice to grandparents across the country who are caring for their grandchildren under the hardest of circumstances. I also look forward to introducing Doctor Sharon McDaniel from Pittsburgh before hearing from our panel.

Like Maine, Pennsylvania has been hit hard by the opioid epidemic. In 2015, more than 3,200 Pennsylvanians died from drug overdoses. That is an astonishing 20 percent increase over the 2014 total. As the Center for Disease Control and Prevention repeatedly points out, the majority of these drug overdoses are caused

by opioids. The reality is that opioid addiction is devastating the lives of individuals with addiction. It is also putting a strain on health care services and law enforcement in communities across this country. It is also taking a toll on families.

Too often, moms and dads are falling victim to the epidemic and grandparents are stepping in to care for the children. That is one of the reasons why the number of children being raised by grandparents is on the rise. In Pennsylvania, 103,000 children are in the care of their grandparents or other relatives. Experts point to opioids as a major driver of the growth in that number.

Any parent will tell you that raising a child is rewarding and fulfilling. But it is also challenging. For grandparents, it can dramatically alter their life plans. They postpone retirement and keep working longer to be able to afford school clothes, child care, and food. Some, deplete their nest-eggs and retirement savings to finance these new costs. Many are isolated from their social networks.

Raising the children of a parent struggling with addiction presents additional challenges for grandparents. Often they spend time in the courts struggling to sort out custody. Frequently, they need to learn the special education system to get their grandchildren the supports they need. Children of addicted parents have often experienced trauma, and been exposed to violence and drug use, so grandparents must address a child's mental health needs. And, they may need to help the child

navigate their relationship with their parent who is still using opioids. All of this can be overwhelming when you expected the next phase of your life to be retirement and it takes a toll on the grandparents' physical and mental health.

These are all significant challenges for grandparents, but of course, most grandparents say that it is all worth it to have the peace of mind knowing that their grandchildren are safe. Grandparents stepping up to take on the role of primary caretaker of their grandchildren deserve our support. They should not feel isolated and unsure where to turn for help.

There are supports like the National Family Caregiver Support Program under the Older Americans Act. This program helps grandfamilies by providing caregivers counseling, and respite care. With grandfamilies on the rise, ensuring adequate federal funding is critical. There is also the modest child-only Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funding that families can access. But there is not a go-to place for older Americans facing this situation. As more and more seniors take on this role, we need to be thinking about how to better serve them.

That's why I would like to work with Chairman Collins and others on legislation to create a one-stop-shop for everyone trying to help grandparents raising their grandchildren to help make their job easier. We also need to continue to expand access to treatment. I am pleased that we have provided \$1 billion in funding to states over the next two years to combat the opioid epidemic as part of

the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Cures bill. This funding is vital in this fight, but so too is the Affordable Care Act and Medicaid. Researchers estimate that ACA repeal would remove at least \$5.5 billion annually from the treatment of with mental health and substance use disorders. This would be an annual loss that is more than five times greater than the total investment from Cures.

At the height of an epidemic, we must not lose ground on health care coverage. It is too important to every generation – grandparent, parent, and child. I am committed to fighting to ensure that we maintain the vital programs that today help older Americans and grandparents raising grandchildren. Our hearing today will help us learn from past experiences – including issues faced by grandparents affected by the crack cocaine epidemic in the 80s and 90s. We cannot arrest our way out of the opioid epidemic. Treatment matters so that grandparents can be grandparents and grandchildren can be grandchildren.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about how we can do just that.