

U.S. SENATOR BOB CASEY

 RANKING MEMBER *Special Committee on Aging*

Sen. Casey's Opening Statement Hearing on Preventing and Treating Opioid Misuse Among Older Americans May 23, 2018

“Thank you, Madam Chairman, for holding this hearing today on this critically important topic

“When I ask the people of Pennsylvania how opioids affect their families, I am met with, and I know this goes for every Senator who goes home to talk about these issues, I’m met with one too many harrowing stories. Over and over again. Story after story.

“One of the worst stories— probably the worst story or the most telling metric unfortunately—was something that a coroner in one of our counties said to me last summer, back in August, when we went around the state county after county, dealing with this horror. He told me that, because of opioid overdoses, he had run out of places to put the bodies. Too many bodies were coming in every night, there was no place to put them. Literally running out of space. More than any other story, this one underscores the urgent need for Congress to continue to take aggressive action.

“The opioid epidemic is ravaging our communities. I’m not sure that adequately describes it. It’s in every corner of our country—from small, rural towns to bustling city centers and even to suburbs. It affects people of all ages—from tiny little babies to aging grandparents.

“Recently, 60 minutes told the story of how grandparents across the country are ‘saving a generation’ by stepping up to raise their grandchildren. I think that is why we have a responsibility to save these multiple generations.

“That’s why I introduced legislation to provide \$45 billion in federal support to support community programs to detect, prevent, and treat opioid misuse. And, that’s why I am working with Chairman Collins to make sure that grandparents raising their grandchildren, whose parents are lost to opioids, know where to turn for both education and support.

“It’s also why I’ve been working on a bipartisan basis with Leader McConnell to create a federal plan to provide opioid treatment for infants as well as to pregnant and postpartum women.

“And I’ve also worked with Senator Portman so that older Americans and people with disabilities have Medicare coverage for the opioid treatment that’s right for them.

“I was pleased to join Democrats and Republicans in providing \$6 billion dollars to states to fund prevention, treatment, and recovery efforts over the next two years. But, I know that’s not enough. Nearly 13 Pennsylvanians are lost every day due to a drug overdose. Beyond the opioid issue but substance use disorder overall.

“We have to do more for every generation, and we have to do it now.

“Older Americans are among those unseen in this epidemic. In 2016, one in three people with a Medicare prescription drug plan received an opioid prescription. This puts Baby Boomers and our oldest generation at great risk.

“More than 1,400 older adults lost their lives to opioids in 2016—1,400 people, despite the availability of life-saving medications that reverse overdose. These startling facts beg the question—what more should we be doing? What barriers prevent older Americans from accessing treatment? What more can Congress do to ensure that not one more senior goes without recovery services?

“For instance, I am exploring how to make opioid treatment more affordable. A high copayment shouldn’t stand between a senior who needs treatment and their access to care.

“It’s time for bold, and bipartisan leadership to address the wreckage of this dreadful epidemic. Indeed, this hearing is an important step in doing just that. And I want to thank Chairman Collins again and I look forward to our witness testimony.”

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