

***Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee hearing on  
The Opioid Crisis Response Act  
April 11, 2018***

On Wednesday, April 11, the Senate Health, Education, Labor & Pensions (HELP) Committee held a hearing on the Opioid Crisis Response Act of 2018. Click [here](#) for the text of the discussion draft, and [here](#) for a summary.

For a webcast of the hearing and witness testimonies, see [here](#). For HELP Chairman Lamar Alexander's (R-TN) opening statement, see [here](#). For Senate HELP Ranking Member Patty Murray's (D-WA) opening statement, see [here](#).

Witnesses who testified at the hearing included:

- **Jennifer Donahue, Esq., Child Abuse Investigation Coordinator, Delaware Office of the Child Advocate, Georgetown, DE**
- **Robert I.L. Morrison, Executive Director, National Association of State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors, Washington, D.C.**
- **Jessica Hulsey Nickel, President And CEO, Addiction Policy Forum, Washington, D.C.**

Senator Alexander announced that the Committee will mark up the Opioid Response Act of 2018 on Tuesday, April 24<sup>th</sup>. He promptly turned to smile and encourage staff gathered behind the members. It was clear there is a lot of work yet to be done between now and April 24<sup>th</sup>. In their opening statements, both Sens. Alexander and Murray summed up all of the Senate HELP Committee's hearings this year, and thanked the numerous stakeholders who provided input, as well as the individuals and experts they encountered in the many roundtables convened in their states.

Rob Morrison of NASADAD and Jessica Nickel of Addiction Policy Forum testified on the high-level principles or patient stories that put a human face on the opioid epidemic. Those principles and stories were included in their written statements that are linked above.

Jennifer Donahue testified in support of new funding for programs to 1) better treat substance exposed infants; 2) fund expansion of the behavioral health workforce; 3) access funding for mental health services in schools; and 4) fund data collection and technical assistance to states for development of "Plans of Safe Care" that would establish protocols for substance exposed infants and the children of addicted parents. To put a finer point on her funding request, she told a heartbreaking story of baby Aiden who lost his life after he was born substance exposed taken home by heroin addicted parents where he died after sustaining physical and brain injuries.

During the question and answer period, several key themes emerged:

- Prevention, keeping infants and children affected by the opioid epidemic safe, and the need for trauma informed care in schools, for pregnant women with substance use disorders and for those in treatment: from Sens. Johnny Isakson (R-GA), Patty Murray (D-WA), Bob Casey (D-PA), Pat Roberts (R-KS):
- The need for flexibility to use funding for addiction and not just opiates: from Sens. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), and Tammy Baldwin (D-WI).

- Recovery support services: from Sens. Susan Collins (R-ME), Chris Murphy (D-CT), Baldwin (D-WI), Doug Jones (D-AL), and Elizabeth Warren (D-MA).
- Importance of telemedicine: from Sens. Roberts and Alexander.
- Need for additional job training and workforce development from Sens. Maggie Hassan (D-NH), Casey, Jones, Murray and Todd Young (R-IN).
- Whether Congress should tell states what to do on key issues like Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs (PDMPs) and prescribing practices, or whether they should let states the approach taken in the discussion draft: from Sens. Alexander, Warren and Bill Cassidy (R-LA).
- Sustained funding versus grant programs: from Sens. Alexander, Murray and Warren.
- Privacy, educating of hospital counsels on what information is permitted to be shared under HIPAA and 42 CFR from Sen. Cassidy.
- State accountability from Sen. Cassidy.

Today's hearing is expected to be the last for the HELP Committee prior to the scheduled April 24<sup>th</sup> markup, but we expect several members of the Committee to introduce bills in the next week as well as significant advocacy to get those bills and/or other refinements in the legislation prior to the markup.