

# Westmoreland County



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## Office of the District Attorney

STATEMENT OF JOHN W. PECK

WESTMORELAND COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY

OCTOBER 9, 2013

HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

Chairman Marsico and Committee Members,

Underlying our drug overdose epidemic in Westmoreland County is the fact that the majority of drug overdoses are the result of prescription drugs not heroin. Yet heroin and prescription drug overdoses are intimately linked. According to Dr. Neil Capretto, Medical Director of the Aliquippa-based Gateway Rehabilitation Center, of all the new heroin users he treats, probably 90-95% started off with prescription drugs. (Greensburg Tribune Review, September 23, 2013).

As a matter of common sense, to address the overdose epidemic, we must address the abuse of prescription drugs.

An effective means of combating prescription drug abuse is through the use of a strong drug monitoring program. Such a program would collect information regarding the persons to whom controlled substances are dispensed and permit access to that information to authorized individuals. Such information could identify inappropriate prescriptions, doctor shopping, pharmacy shopping, and prescription fraud.

Our present collection system is inadequate since only schedule II drug information is collected and therefore most prescription drugs are not included in the data base. Further, the information collected at the present time is not available to doctors and pharmacists.

HB 1694 allows for the collection of additional information concerning controlled substances and allows access to such information to pharmacists, doctors, and law enforcement.

Given the strong link between prescription drug abuse and heroin and prescription overdoses, I want to emphasize that the sooner you can enact legislation, like HB 1694, that will improve and expand our prescription drug database, the sooner we can attack the heroin epidemic. Our current data base only collects schedule II controlled substances, and our pharmacists and physicians do not have access to the information in the data base. The weak data base has all but invited the level of prescription drug abuse we see now. I ask that when you return to Harrisburg you pass HB 1694.

I am also aware that the bill may be amended. I would ask that should you put restrictions on schedule III through V access, the standard be reasonable suspicion. Anything more would tie the hands of law enforcement and prevent us from being proactive. Access to schedule II drugs should remain the same. Finally, whatever you do to require pharmacists to check the database before they dispense a prescription will only help our collective efforts.

Thank you for this opportunity to review these matters with you.