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Public Hearing on Law Enforcement Response to the Current Heroin Epidemic
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Good morning Chairman Marsico, Chairman Caltagirone, and members of the Judiciary Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to share with you the Office of Attorney General's perspective on the heroin epidemic in Pennsylvania, and the proactive measures we are taking to cripple its proliferation in our Commonwealth.

For the first time ever, heroin has replaced cocaine as the drug of choice in Pennsylvania. In fact, the majority of statewide cases handled by our Bureau of Narcotics Investigation (BNI) cases are heroin-related. Many others are poly-drug cases, or cases where heroin is accompanied by any combination of cocaine, methamphetamine, and marijuana. Heroin is extremely easy to obtain in Pennsylvania and throughout the northeastern United States. This is due in great measure to increased production of heroin in Mexico and the seemingly unfettered transportation of huge quantities across the southwest border with Mexico.

Mexican-produced heroin is becoming purer and the low prices we see throughout Pennsylvania suggest that Mexican drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) have very effectively established and control a market foothold in the Commonwealth. The revenue flowing back to Mexico is staggering. Mexican DTOs transport bulk currency across the border. Money is also laundered through gift cards, property purchases, legitimate businesses such as salons, and money orders. According to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration's *National Drug Threat Assessment* for 2013, Mexican transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) represent the greatest organizational drug threat to the nation.

Mexican TCOs are the predominate transporters of wholesale quantities of cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine, and marijuana to U.S. markets. These smuggling and trafficking groups continue to expand into new regions while increasing their control of local distribution networks. Pennsylvania is considered both a destination as well as a source for heroin coming into the region.

In addition to the high availability, high purity, and low price of Mexican heroin, the distribution networks utilized by the Mexican TCOs are formidable. In the past, drug trafficking organizations and associated street-level operations were insular in nature, and more easily exposed by law enforcement. Today, Mexican cartels have effectively co-opted organic local

street distribution networks, street gangs and prison gangs. The local networks often have several degrees of separation from the cartels in Mexico and law enforcement may view the local threat as nothing more than a local drug trafficking organization.

Our assessment of the presence and operational capability of the Mexican cartels in Pennsylvania is based on our intelligence, cases we are prosecuting, and our state and federal partners' concurrence. While their home base is in Mexico, the cartels have the ability to project their influence, control, and intimidation over great distances. DTOs are extremely dangerous and pose a serious threat to communities across this Commonwealth. Competition for profitable drug markets results in: homicides, shootings, assaults, arsons, and robberies as dealers fight over territory and intimidate rival dealers, witnesses, and neighborhood residents.

The Office of the Attorney General has successfully arrested and prosecuted cases with direct ties to the Mexican cartels. Our investigations are ongoing and as we follow the trail of evidence, we know that these cartels maintain a strong grip over drug trafficking and money laundering activities in Pennsylvania.

Within my office I have tasked the Bureau of Narcotics Investigation and Drug Control with addressing the heroin epidemic growing problem in a holistic, comprehensive manner. We have taken a strategic approach that focuses on targeting multifaceted criminal organizations and complex drug trafficking conspiracies.

Under my direction, the Office of Attorney General now maintains a heroin stamp database with more than 1,200 stamps identified since January 2013. We are building a robust intelligence analysis capability that will allow us to look at the state as an integrated enterprise, collect relevant law enforcement information from all sources, and put substantive meaning to that information in order to inform all stakeholders. Most importantly, we seek to inform the public without compromising the sensitive nature of our investigations so that they know what measures we are taking to ensure their safety.

We are collaborating with local, state and national law enforcement because the sale and use of heroin is not limited to our borders. Establishing meaningful partnerships based on mutual threats and operational best practices is fundamental to combatting the availability of heroin in our communities.

Take for example our Interdiction efforts. Interdiction efforts are those aimed at intercepting drugs and/ or money flowing through the transportation system (highways, planes, trains, private autos and boats) as well as toll areas and border crossings, U.S. Postal service, and commercial shippers such as FedEx UPS. They even include hotels through which traffickers are known to operate. Whether a shipment of heroin is intended for Pennsylvania or passing through our state for another regional destination, we have a vested interest in interdicting that cargo and determining both its source and its destination.

Collaboration with neighbor states, trans-shipment cities and states, and border states is absolutely critical to our ongoing efforts to stem the rate and volume of drugs flowing in and through Pennsylvania.

Heroin-related overdoses and deaths as a result of overdoses, sadly, are on the rise in the Commonwealth. Pennsylvania has the third highest number of heroin users, behind California and Illinois, with an average 40,000 users. These overdoses are likely attributable to the combination of high purity, low cost and availability. In 2012, there were 329 overdose deaths in the 48 counties that reported fatal overdose data. Victim's ages range from 19- to 86-years old.

And, the number of heroin users is on the rise in part because first-time users are getting younger. In 2011, the national average age for initial heroin use was 22. The number of first-time users continues to rise, and over half of heroin users become dependent. In 2010 in Pennsylvania, heroin was listed as the primary substance of abuse among 20 to 29 year olds, followed closely by prescription opioids.

We also are seeing a correlation between prescription drug abuse and heroin use; some individuals who abuse prescription opioid pain killers switch to heroin because it is cheaper and easier to obtain. To that end, there has been an explosion in the diversion of pharmaceutical drugs for illicit sale and abuse. Pennsylvania has seen rapid, significant increases in prescription pill abuse, overdoses and overdose deaths, and illicit trafficking of pharmaceutical drugs. Otherwise legitimate prescriptions, particularly opioid narcotic analgesics, are easily obtained and either abused directly or sold for illegitimate use. Likewise, unscrupulous physicians or their staffs sell or barter prescriptions. We see prescription pill abuse starting at very early ages.

In many cases, the dependency on prescription pills becomes prohibitively expensive to maintain, thus the abuser ultimately turns to heroin as a cheaper, more available, but deadlier alternative. Those individuals who reported using prescription pills recreationally are 19 times more likely to begin using heroin.

Part of the problem is that Pennsylvania, unlike many other states, does not have any means to track Schedule III, IV, and V controlled substances. The implementation of a prescription monitoring program would assist in the prevention of prescription drug abuse and heroin use by providing prescribing practitioners with relevant information concerning the drugs that have recently been prescribed to their patients. A critical part of our statewide counterdrug effort is focused, relevant education and outreach. Nowhere do we see a more pressing need for outreach than to adolescent and young adults as it applies to the impending heroin threat.

I have directed my staff to be innovative in their approach to communicating to young adults in a meaningful, relevant, and effective way. We are proactively engaging middle and high schools statewide in an effort to receive perspective from students on what they are seeing and hearing from their peers.

We are learning from students how social media plays into the drug threat in schools and how the Office of the Attorney General needs to communicate with adolescents in a manner that adequately serves the students while allowing us to accurately assess the true threat. By making students engaged stakeholders and problems solvers, I believe that we can more effectively communicate with students while learning from them what message truly resonates and how we can empower students to help stem the drug threat.

Our working relationship with the legislature on counterdrug initiatives and innovations must continue to grow. We share the very same constituents and I view my role as informing and educating members of the legislature and citizens of the Commonwealth on the true nature and scope of the drug threat while offering meaningful solutions to addressing and combating that threat. The same is true of our relationship with members of Pennsylvania's Congressional Delegation. As I indicated earlier, I view the drug threat from a strategic point of view. I believe that the drug threat to Pennsylvania is far more expansive than what we see at the street level and that we share many urgent smuggling and trafficking issues with Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, and California.

In order to continue our strategic approach, which in my view is the only real effective way to combat the threat from drugs and the criminal organizations responsible for bringing them to Pennsylvania, we must work closely with the legislature to create innovative law enforcement programs.

For example, the Mobile Street Crimes Unit is a solution for the transient nature and unpredictable behavior of sophisticated drug trafficking organizations that target communities which lack sufficient police resources. This \$3 million initiative, passed by the Pennsylvania legislature in June, allows the Office of Attorney General to deploy into communities (unannounced) a sophisticated, tactical, and mobile team, including a prosecutor, seasoned narcotics agents, and intelligence analysts to quell the increase in violent drug-trafficking organizations. Once the impact from the MSCU has been realized and the hand-off to local police authorities affected, the MSCU will move on to another hotspot in Pennsylvania.

The Office of Attorney General is the chief law enforcement agency in the Commonwealth therefore it is our duty to leverage our expertise and prosecutorial experience. I am forging relationships with Attorneys General throughout the nation and we continue to identify and use best practices whenever appropriate.

None of us can alone solve the scourge of drug abuse and trafficking. Our best hope for success in fighting the heroin epidemic in Pennsylvania is through collaboration and education from agency to agency, student to student, parent to parent, and with our partners in the General Assembly, who pass legislation and approve funding that enables us to do our job.