

**Opening Remarks of Ranking Member Sablan
Joint HELP Subcommittee/Workforce Protections Subcommittee Hearing:
“The Opioids Epidemic: Implications for America's Workplaces”
Thursday, February 15, 2018 at 10:00 a.m.
Rayburn 2175**

Thank you, Chairman Walberg.

The opioid crisis has ravaged communities across the United States.

It is no surprise that the impacts of the crisis are being felt in the workplace – by both workers and businesses. From workplace accidents and injuries, employee absenteeism, low morale, and increased illness and lost productivity, our workplaces are experiencing the challenges of this epidemic. U.S. companies lose billions of dollars a year because of employees' drug and alcohol use and related problems. But it is the human toll that is the most devastating consequence of this epidemic.

We know that those with substance use disorders come from all walks of life. From our factories to our board rooms, the health needs of our workforce should be a top priority. Sadly, these needs have gone unmet and behavioral health care has been out of reach for many, particularly lower wage workers, racial and ethnic minorities and other marginalized populations.

The Affordable Care Act improved and expanded treatment for people with substance use disorders through Medicaid and private insurance. The law mandated substance use disorders treatment as part of “essential health benefits”, and broadened parity requirements to ensure that behavioral health is covered at the same levels as other medical coverage. Further, insurers can no longer deny coverage to people with substance use disorders or mental health conditions.

Maintaining these important gains is paramount in the response to this crisis. Attempts to roll back these advances by weakening consumer protections or cutting Medicaid, will only take us backwards. Additional funding at the federal level to combat the crisis will be squandered if we do not provide access to health coverage and a safe place to live and work. The President’s new budget proposal is another missed opportunity to have a meaningful conversation about improving health in this country. Proposing to eliminate coverage and protections for millions of Americans is counterproductive, particularly during a crisis of this magnitude.

Addressing the opioid epidemic requires a robust and coordinated approach. Efforts to prevent workplace injuries and illnesses are a critical step toward avoiding the prescription of opioids that initiates abuse. We should examine all the impacts that substance use disorder has on families and all the tools we have to help, including expanding prevention efforts, focusing on the entire family, increasing access to treatment, and facilitating recovery. We need to support those in recovery and provide them with economic opportunity to reintegrate into the community. Addressing addiction through treatment, instead of punishment and incarceration, should be applied across the board to all communities.

It's encouraging that the Committee is taking time to discuss this issue and I am hopeful that we can address it through increased funding for effective, evidence-based programs that help workers access health coverage and treatment. A healthy workforce is key to a healthy economy.

I thank the witnesses for taking the time to testify today and look forward to hearing from them.

Thank you. I yield back my time to the chair.