

**Opening Statement of the Honorable Fred Upton  
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations  
Hearing on “Examining the Growing Problems of Prescription Drug and Heroin Abuse:  
State and Local Perspectives”  
March 26, 3015**

*(As Prepared for Delivery)*

Today we continue our important review of the growing epidemic of prescription drug and heroin abuse. The state and local perspective of this growing threat is essential as we evaluate what steps we can take at the federal level to help address this crisis.

Sadly, communities all across the country have been affected by prescription drug and heroin abuse, including southwestern Michigan. Devastatingly, heroin overdoses are on the rise due to a combination of high demand and purity that can make this drug more lethal. There were 13 suspected overdoses in Kalamazoo in the first quarter of 2013, compared to 9 in the first quarter of 2012.

This unwelcome trend is unfortunately all too familiar as opiate-related overdoses have recently become the No.1 cause of death in Michigan and nationwide, surpassing motor vehicle crashes, suicide, firearms, and homicide.

The reality of heroin overdoses has hit hard in Kalamazoo County the last few years. In 2008, we lost Amy Bousfield, 18 years old and a graduate of Portage Central High School. In 2012, Marissa King died at 21 years old. She began using heroin in 2009, despite having lost two friends to the drug, including Amy Bousfield. Like 40 percent of those who abuse drugs, Marissa had an underlying mental illness. She was diagnosed with bipolar disorder, had struggled with depression, and had abused prescription drugs before turning to heroin after graduating from Comstock High School.

There are many heart-breaking stories like this across the country. We are losing about 20,000 people a year from abuse of prescription pain killers or heroin. As we continue to mourn the loss of all these lives, testimony from today’s witnesses provides us hope that there are effective approaches making a real difference in fighting opioid abuse. This is a great opportunity for this committee, working on a bipartisan basis, to help improve the federal government’s response to this epidemic.

I am especially pleased to welcome one of today’s witnesses, my friend Vic Fitz, the Cass County Prosecutor and the President of the Prosecuting Attorneys Association of Michigan. Vic has 31 years of experience in prosecuting drug cases, and will share his insights as well as those of his fellow prosecutors in Michigan on this issue. I would note that the heroin dealer who sold the heroin that killed Amy Bousfield was caught, convicted, and sentenced to 10 and a half to 40 years in prison. We appreciate the work of Vic and his fellow prosecutors who have held dealers accountable to the law, and helped addicts straighten out their lives. I thank him for his service, and for participating at today’s hearing.

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