

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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### Ranking Member Jamie Raskin Committee on Oversight and Accountability Hearing on “Oversight and Reauthorization of the Office of National Drug Control Policy” July 27, 2023

Thank you, Chairman Comer, and thank you, Director Gupta, for joining us today. In the coming weeks, this Committee will face the important task of reauthorizing the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP). This office plays a critical role within the executive branch, coordinating a whole-of-government response to reduce drug addiction and prevent overdoses, which touch nearly every family and certainly every community in America. Overdose deaths have reached record levels in recent years, and while deaths remain shockingly too high, we are making progress reducing the frequency of overdoses nationwide. This is partially because of the tremendous work of ONDCP.

**Without ONDCP’s coordination and oversight of our country’s drug policy, strategy and budget, our public health and law enforcement agencies would still be working ineffectively in silos, and federal investments to tackle this problem—totaling \$ 41 billion in fiscal year 2022—would be siphoned off into waste and inefficiency. Instead, because of ONDCP, our federal agencies collaborate to address the complex problems of addiction and overdose as part of a well-focused National Drug Control Strategy.**

This comprehensive approach means that we can better deploy federal resources to help the communities hit hardest by drug trafficking and staggering rates of addiction, including by working to keep drugs out of the hands of children and to make sure people experiencing overdoses have access to life-saving overdose reversal medication.

After generally rising for more than two decades, overdose deaths in America skyrocketed to historic highs during the coronavirus pandemic, when they increased by more than 30% in 2020. The rate of increase slowed to 15% in 2021 and slowed again in 2022. While overdoses remain far too common, and a single overdose is too many, we have made remarkable strides in the past year, and new CDC data shows opioid overdose rates plateauing for the first time in many years. But we cannot continue this progress without re-authorizing ONDCP.

Democrats and Republicans should work together to address the underlying causes of addiction. When we talk about the opioid crisis or the fentanyl crisis, we are really talking about many different social crises bearing down upon us, including the mental and emotional health crisis and, in communities and regions, an economic and opportunity crisis. It does no service to our communities and families harmed by addiction to falsely blame opioid overdoses on a fake crisis at the southern border.

**We are talking about more than 40 million people in America who have substance use disorders, with many of them facing serious underlying mental health problems. We are talking about people who lack the resources they need to treat mental illness, who face tremendous stigma in obtaining treatment and**

**who may self-medicate with alcohol, fentanyl and other illicit drugs. More than 100,000 of our constituents, family members, and friends lost their lives to drug overdoses last year.**

**We must re-authorize ONDCP to ensure that America's young people have access to treatment, both for substance use disorders and other mental illnesses, so they do not end up overdosing or going to prison for committing drug fueled crimes.** More than 60% of children who experience depression do not get the treatment they need, which exposes them to the temptation to use dangerous substances to self-medicate in the absence of robust mental health support networks that could see them through to safety.

**We must re-authorize ONDCP to halt the flow of fentanyl into our country.** Thanks to the work of ONDCP and the entire Biden-Harris Administration, U.S. Customs and Border Protection seized nearly 245,000 pounds of illicit drugs at our southern border, including 21,000 pounds of illegal fentanyl from March 2022 through February 2023.

Because we now have a coordinated, all-of-government response, we are seizing more fentanyl before it invades our communities, and we are ensuring that law enforcement agencies have the tools they need to arrest illicit drug traffickers. We are disrupting the criminal cartel networks that operate from China to Mexico and have denied nearly \$2 billion to drug manufacturers and criminal traffickers. Under ONDCP's leadership, the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas Program is working effectively and efficiently, and in 2022 we saw a return on investment of \$82 for every \$1 of funding for the Program.

ONDCP is working with our homeland security agencies to ramp up the use of high-tech devices drug detection technology along our southern border, including installing new non-invasive scanners to catch trucks attempting to traffic fentanyl into America. These new technologies appear to be working in dramatic fashion, because fentanyl seizures are up 400% along the southern border and 90% of illicit fentanyl is now being caught at ports of entry and vehicle checkpoints.

**Earlier this month, ONDCP released the nation's first Response Plan for fentanyl adulterated with Xylazine, after designating the substance an emerging threat. ONDCP would not have been able to make this designation without new authorities granted to ONDCP during reauthorization in 2018.** Because of the new designation, ONDCP can coordinate a rapid response to the drug by, among other things, surging resources to state and local entities combatting the threat in real time at street level.

**We cannot efficiently address the addiction and illicit drug control problems we face without discussing the problems of both supply and demand. While blocking fentanyl, methamphetamine, and other dangerous drugs from entering our country is crucially important, we must also address the prevalence of untreated mental illness and rampant drug use which create a market for these drugs in the first place. And importantly, we must also ensure that people experiencing drug overdose can get access to emergency medications that can save their lives.**

**Thanks to the bipartisan, bicameral work of this Committee and others in Congress, naloxone, an opioid overdose reversal medication, is set to be available over-the-counter in a few weeks. And thanks to the good work of ONDCP, more of our schools and workplaces have overdose reversal medications readily available and easily accessible. We must continue our work to ensure these medications remain affordable and accessible where they can mean the difference between life and death.**

**Dr. Gupta, I look forward to hearing from you today about your critical work and thank you for joining us for this important hearing as we work to re-authorize ONDCP.**

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