



# COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Subcommittee Hearing Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)**

### ***Examining DHS's Efforts to Combat the Opioid Epidemic***

**May 18, 2022**

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, there were 91,799 drug-involved overdose deaths reported in America in 2020. Opioids are the main cause of drug overdose deaths, with a 6-fold increase from 2015 to 2020. In my home state of Mississippi, 440 people tragically lost their lives to drug overdoses in 2020. And deaths from overdoses have only increased during the pandemic. Opioids pose a devastating threat to communities across the country.

For its part, DHS is working with Federal, State, local and international partners to prevent dangerous drugs from crossing our borders. We know that the overwhelming majority of hard drugs such as fentanyl, heroin, and methamphetamine enter our Nation through ports of entry, usually concealed in commercial traffic or passenger vehicles. CBP officers at ports of entry use Non-Intrusive Inspection systems to scan travelers, vehicles, cargo, and packages for contraband.

While the Department's goal is a 100% scan rate, less than 2% of private vehicles and 15% of commercial vehicles are currently screened for narcotics at the Southwest border. We need to keep working to increase these scan rates and improve interdiction efforts across ports of entry and in our mail facilities.

We also need to thwart the transnational criminal organizations responsible for smuggling drugs into our communities. We need to stop these drugs from ever reaching our borders, in addition to seizing the drugs that do make it to our borders. I will continue to work with the Department to ensure it has the personnel and resources it needs to tackle this epidemic head-on. However, we must also recognize that this is just one part of the solution.

Law enforcement and border security, while very important, will not be enough. We must also tackle this crisis with treatment and recovery options to restore people's health and break the devastating cycles of addiction. This must be a robust whole-of-government operation.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today on their operations, successes, and challenges in preventing drugs from reaching our communities. I also welcome any suggestions they have on how we can further reduce the flow of narcotics into American communities.

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