

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 23, 2024

**Center for Rural Pennsylvania Marks 10 Years Addressing Opioid
and Substance Use Disorder Crisis**

BERKS COUNTY — The Center for Rural Pennsylvania Board of Directors recently hosted a public hearing at Kutztown University in Berks County to address the pressing challenges of the opioid crisis and substance use disorders in the Commonwealth. This marked the Center's 20th hearing focused on opioid and SUD issues, coinciding with its 10-year anniversary of addressing the public health emergency.

"The Center for Rural Pennsylvania has spent over a decade working to combat Pennsylvania's heroin and opioid crisis," said Senator Gene Yaw, Chairman of the Center for Rural Pennsylvania Board of Directors. "We've worked with the legislature on significant policy measures to limit the amount of opioids that may be prescribed to minors, require additional training for medical professionals, and improve access to addiction in rural areas. There is still work to be done, but the Center's 20th hearing on this issue is noteworthy, and I'm proud that Pennsylvania has been a leader in this fight."

"The Center for Rural Pennsylvania has been an important voice and resource for the Commonwealth in our efforts to address the opioid crisis and substance use disorders," said Representative Eddie Day Pashinski, Vice Chairman of the Center for Rural Pennsylvania Board. "This hearing allowed the Board to reflect on the progress we've made in reducing stigma around SUD and increasing access to life-saving medications like naloxone and evidence-based treatments like medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD)—while still examining what else we can do to save more lives."

"Thanks largely to the excellent work the Center for Rural Pennsylvania has done studying this issue for a decade, we now have a much better understanding of how opioids impact rural parts of our Commonwealth," said Senator Judy Schwank, member of the Center for Rural Pennsylvania Board. "The legislature has acted on many of the Center's recommendations, including tightening regulations on prescription opioids, expanding coverage for medication-assisted treatment, and directing the Pennsylvania Department of Health to develop a strategic plan. I'm proud we are working together to ensure the challenges rural communities face are being addressed through public policy."

"The Center is deeply committed to high-quality research that enables officials to advance evidence-based policies to combat the substance use disorder crisis in our rural

communities,” said Dr. Kyle C. Kopko, Executive Director of the Center for Rural Pennsylvania. “While we have made real progress in expanding access to treatment and reducing overdoses across Pennsylvania, this issue will continue to be a priority of the Center for the foreseeable future.”

Testifiers included:

- Kelly Primus, Deputy Secretary, Pennsylvania Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs
- Dr. William Santoro, St. Luke's University Hospital Network, and Immediate Past President of the Pennsylvania Society of Addiction Medicine
- Kim Botteicher, Executive Director, FAVOR–Western PA
- Brian Michael, Director, Liberty Mid-Atlantic HIDTA
- Tamar Wallace, Public Health Analyst, Liberty Mid-Atlantic HIDTA
- Van Jackson, Drug Intelligence Officer, Liberty Mid-Atlantic HIDTA
- Andrew Thompson, Intelligence Support Center Manager, Liberty Mid-Atlantic HIDTA
- Rebecka Rosenquist, Health Policy Director, PolicyLab, Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia
- Dr. Jennifer Whittaker, Research Scientist, PolicyLab, Children's Hospital of Philadelphia
- (Written Testimony) Kathy Noll, Executive Director, Council on Chemical Abuse

Access the written testimony and video recording of the public hearing on the Center’s website at www.rural.pa.gov.

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