

By: Representative Ballinger

HOUSE RESOLUTION

RECOGNIZING THE PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY CREATED BY THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC IN ARKANSAS; AND RESOLVING TO ADDRESS THE PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY AND TO SUPPORT EFFORTS TO RESPOND TO THE PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY.

Subtitle

RECOGNIZING THE PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY CREATED BY THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC IN ARKANSAS; AND RESOLVING TO ADDRESS THE PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY AND TO SUPPORT EFFORTS TO RESPOND TO THE PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY.

WHEREAS, drug poisoning deaths are the leading cause of unintentional injury death in the United States, outnumbering those deaths caused by firearms, car crashes, suicide, and homicide; and

WHEREAS, drug overdose is now the leading cause of death for Americans under 50 years old and has removed 2.5 months from the average American's life expectancy; and

WHEREAS, overdose deaths in Arkansas have ballooned over 250% from 5.4 per 100,000 citizens in the year 2000 to 14.0 per 100,000 in 2016; and

WHEREAS, over 1,500 people died from drug overdose deaths in Arkansas from 2013 to 2015, and at least half of those deaths were opioid related; and in 2016 alone, Arkansas saw the number of drug overdose deaths rise to 401,



of which 335 were related to the misuse of opioids; and

WHEREAS, increased availability of prescription opioids corresponds with increased use and overdose, and Arkansas has been particularly susceptible to the rapid expansion of opioid availability; and

WHEREAS, Arkansas has the second-highest opioid prescription rate in the country, with doctors writing 114.6 opioid prescriptions for every 100 persons in 2016; and

WHEREAS, Arkansas has the highest rate in the country of misuse of prescription opioids by children ages 12 to 17 at 6.2%; and

WHEREAS, on October 26, 2017, the President of the United States declared the opioid crisis to be a nationwide public health emergency; and

WHEREAS, the Arkansas General Assembly has taken steps to create and improve the Arkansas Prescription Drug Monitoring Program, a program that has become a model for other states; and

WHEREAS, Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson and Arkansas Drug Director Kirk Lane have shown great leadership in response to the opioid epidemic; Governor Hutchinson and Director Lane have supported legislation allowing pharmacists to dispense naloxone, a temporary antidote for opioid overdose, without a prescription; and they have helped establish a statewide protocol for tracking the prescribing and dispensing of opioids in Arkansas; and

WHEREAS, Arkansas Attorney General Leslie Rutledge has also shown great leadership in response to the opioid epidemic; General Rutledge introduced Prescription for Life, a first-in-the-nation educational tool that is free to high schools across Arkansas through her office; and she is a cosponsor of the annual Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention Summit, a program that provides free training and educational opportunities for law enforcement officers, medical professionals, pharmacists, and educators on prescription drug abuse prevention and treatment; and

WHEREAS, local officials across Arkansas, including county judges, mayors, sheriffs, police chiefs, fire chiefs, first responders, coroners, and others, have shown great leadership in responding to the adverse effects of the opioid epidemic in law enforcement, jails, the court system, local communities, and families; and

WHEREAS, despite the laudable efforts of state and local officials in Arkansas, the opioid epidemic continues to devastate Arkansas; and

WHEREAS, on January 24, 2018, Attorney General Rutledge announced the state has retained outside counsel to assist her staff lawyers in investigating and potentially prosecuting certain pharmaceutical companies that have contributed to the opioid epidemic in Arkansas; and

WHEREAS, on February 1, 2018, the Association of Arkansas Counties and the Arkansas Municipal League announced that the majority of the counties and cities in Arkansas are working together through the 3 risk management programs that represent virtually all Arkansas cities and counties to pursue litigation against pharmaceutical companies that have contributed to the opioid epidemic in Arkansas; and in a unique and strategic move, the counties and cities announced they will work together to present a unified front against the opioid epidemic in court; and

WHEREAS, the opioid epidemic nationally and in Arkansas is of unprecedented magnitude, and state and local governments have an unprecedented responsibility to pursue all available measures to respond to the opioid epidemic and the substantial adverse impact and cost to our society, local communities, and families; and

WHEREAS, the opioid epidemic is best addressed by cooperation and collaboration by state and local officials in Arkansas,

NOW THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE NINETY-FIRST GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ARKANSAS:

THAT the House of Representatives affirmatively advance and support the leadership roles and efforts to respond to the opioid epidemic by the state, the Governor, the Attorney General, Arkansas counties and the Association of Arkansas Counties, and Arkansas cities and the Arkansas Municipal League.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the House of Representatives encourage the state, counties, and cities to work cooperatively and collaboratively to pursue all available measures to address the unprecedented opioid epidemic, including without limitation unified and cohesive legal action by the state, counties, and cities.