

**Testimony of Michael Harle, President/CEO
The General Assembly of Pennsylvania
Hearing on House Resolution No. 590
September 7, 2016**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak here today. My name is Michael Harle; I am the President/CEO of Gaudenzia, a drug & alcohol treatment organization. We have treatment programs throughout the Commonwealth, including here in Philadelphia. We treat system wide over 20,000 individuals and their families each year. Gaudenzia is the largest private not for profit treatment agency in Pennsylvania, founded in 1968. We were the first residential drug treatment program in Pennsylvania.

Gaudenzia had over **20,000 admissions** to its programs in the past year, for the first time in over 30 years. **Heroin has become the primary drug of choice** over all admissions, overtaking alcohol, marijuana, cocaine and all other drugs combined. The only other major increase is in prescription opiates which have increased ten-fold in the last 5 years. 30% of our admissions are now between the ages of 18 – 25. At the same time **funding has been cut** and treatment shortened. I have attached a synopsis of my testimony at a House Appropriations hearing in 2002 and have illustrated the difference in the primary drug of choice, which shows the trajectory of the epidemic.

Pennsylvania is in the **7th place in drug overdose deaths**, almost at the top of the 50 states.

In 2014 2488 Pennsylvanian's died from overdose. In Philadelphia, 655 overdose deaths in 2014, 349 from heroin.

Heroin use and prescription opiate use is an epidemic causing opiates to be the **number one cause of accidental deaths in the US**. Emergency Room visits for the non-medical use of **opioid pain relievers is 359,921**. Drug abuse related crime is number one among all crimes.

What weighs 111 tons? 22 adult elephants. Every year 69 tons of oxycodone and 42 tons of hydrocodone (prescription opiates) are shipped to pharmacies around the U.S. This is enough to provide 40 Percocet's and 20 Vicodin to every man, woman and child in the country. Heroin is cheaper and more available than ever. The prescription opiates available are stronger and easier to obtain than ever. **Heroin is now cheaper than a pack of cigarettes**. The cost for a pack of cigarettes in Pennsylvania is \$5.88. A bag of 70-90 percent pure heroin in Philadelphia is \$5.00 or less.

This is my testimony at a House Appropriations Budget Committee hearing in April 2002.

During fiscal year 2002 Gaudenzia had 5,164 admissions – in fiscal year 2014 we had 20,000. The primary drugs of choice are as follows:

2002-2003		2012-2013		2014/15
Cocaine	37%	Heroin	26%	42%
Marijuana	27%	Cocaine	24%	19%
Alcohol	17%	Marijuana	22%	18%
Heroin	15%	Alcohol	15%	13%
*Other	4%	*Other	11%	8%

The secondary drugs of choice are as follows:

Cocaine	26%	Alcohol	31%	36%
Marijuana	36%	Marijuana	22%	25%
Alcohol	28%	Heroin	17%	19%
Heroin	5%	*Other	16%	9%
*Other	5%	Cocaine	10%	11%

A quote from my 2002 testimony:

“As you may be aware, there has been increased concern recently over the incidence of OxyContin abuse but those statistics are not yet available. OxyContin, Ecstasy and synthetic drugs are popular with adolescents and young adults”.

***Mostly prescription opiates**

Recommendations:

Thank you for helping to stop the dying.

Enacted the Prescription Drug Monitoring legislation that has been mired in politics between the House and Senate for over 4 years. We are one of only two states without a full Prescription Drug Monitoring Program.

Enacted Narcan legislation so police, firemen and other first responders as well as families can save people from dying from prescription and street opiates.

Enacted Good Samaritan Laws

Treat the Problems....Remove Demand

Restore the \$11.5 million in funding cuts to counties for addiction treatment. Funding for treatment of drug and alcohol addiction through the Behavioral Services Initiative (BHSI) and Act 152 line items have been reduced by \$11.5 million since FY08-09, a 22% reduction. At the same time, the prescription drug and heroin problem in Pennsylvania has reached epidemic levels with hundreds of emergency room admissions, overdoses and overdose deaths reported from across the Commonwealth.

Enact an Emergency Addiction Treatment Fund for long-term treatment for people addicted to prescription and street opiates. The drug companies that manufacture and make billions on the sale of these drugs **should be required to contribute to this fund.**

Stop the drug mills, take licenses from those who are profiting from the epidemic.

Enforce the existing laws, and the federal Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act to ensure that people in need of alcohol and other drug addiction treatment are able to obtain help.

Support/ensure that state agencies are monitoring the use of state and federal funds to ensure people are getting the proper treatment in the proper setting for the proper length of time.

No one is immune. Untreated addiction is tearing at the fabric of our society and costing lives, families, and/or precious resources. More people will die from addiction this year than all 11 years of the Vietnam war.

Let us enact sensible drug policy that saves lives, families, communities and money.

On behalf of our Board of Directors, clients and families, we urge you to respond before more people die, more families are destroyed and the fabric of our communities is torn apart.

