

**United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations**  
Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere, Transnational Crime, Civilian  
Security, Democracy, Human Rights, and Global Women's Issues

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Witness Testimony by Orange County, Florida Mayor Teresa Jacobs  
Remarks as Prepared

**Cartels and the U.S. Heroin Epidemic:  
Combating Drug Violence and Public Health Crisis**

Chairman Rubio, ranking member Boxer, members of the committee...

Thank you for calling this important hearing, and for allowing me to share a local perspective on the terrible threat that heroin poses for cities and counties throughout our country.

First a bit about Orange County: We're home to the City of Orlando and 12 other municipalities, with a population of 1.2 million people, a strong economy and an exceptional quality of life. In 2015, we shattered national tourism records, hosting more than 66 million visitors.

No doubt you know us as the vacation capitol of the world, but tragically, like too many other states and communities, Orange County has seen an alarming increase in the number of heroin overdoses and related deaths. Last year, we lost 85 lives to heroin – a staggering 600% increase since 2011. Already this year we've had more than 90 heroin overdoses in the county, with about one-in-ten resulting in death.

Florida's fight against this current wave of opioid addiction began about five years ago, in the midst of our battle against the pill mills.

You may remember the shocking statistics from 2010, when it was discovered that Florida practitioners purchased more than 41 million oxycodone pills in the first six months of that year - **more than the other 49 states of the union combined.**

Like countless cities, towns and counties across the U.S., we worked to outlaw unauthorized pain clinics and provide resources for breaking opioid addiction.

In Florida, the pill mill “legacy” has impacted us beyond measure. I can’t prove it, but I think it’s very likely that cartels took notice of what they perceived to be a ripe “marketplace.” Today, predatory drug dealers are targeting us with heroin, as well as cheap and deadly strains of fentanyl.

Unfortunately, it’s nearly impossible to accurately assess the threat in Florida, since no statewide databases exist. Instead, numbers are captured by individual agencies and municipalities – there is simply no mechanism for synergy or sharing.

What we do know? We know that last year, approximately 2,000 heroin users moved through our Orange County jail. Many of those were arrested not for heroin possession, but for other offenses related to heroin addiction.

We know that in 2015, we housed 100 expectant mothers tragically addicted to opiates or heroin, as our Jail has become the treatment center of last resort for so many people.

For the good of our citizens and our community, we are fighting back.

Last summer I convened the Orange County Heroin Task Force, and asked our sheriff to Co-Chair the effort. Our joint work is having a positive impact, including passage in the 2016 Florida Legislature of a measure allowing naloxone sales without an individual prescription.

We know there is no single solution, but there **are** some universally effective approaches:

- Enforcement is critical. In a world of increasingly sophisticated technology, our local efforts – no matter how highly leveraged and coordinated – are simply no match against organized traffickers.
- Equally important, and in keeping with what we learned with pill mills, we must be tireless in educating people that addiction **is an illness**. An illness that requires treatment and support not only for the addict, but also for the families who are ravaged by addiction.

In closing, I respectfully ask for your help:

- **Help to stop the influx of drugs** across the border. We've got our hands full at the local level, and are simply not equipped to fight the cartels. This is where we really need your help --- to stop these deadly drugs before they cross our borders.
- **Help to treat more addicts**. With a regional population of 2.5 million, we have one Addictions Receiving Facility with 26 detox beds serving four counties for the uninsured. AND
- **Help to raise awareness** so more people will choose not to try this deadly drug in the first place.

To end this crisis and save lives, we **all** need to be engaged. Thank you for your attention to this critical issue and thank you for your leadership and your service.