



Durbin backs fix to bill that weakened DEA opioid oversight

October 19 2017 4:47 PM

WASHINGTON - Following a recent [article](#) by *The Washington Post* exposing the lobbying effort that led to a weakening of the Drug Enforcement Administration's (DEA) ability to go after pharmaceutical drug distributors at the height of our nation's opioid epidemic, U.S. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) today joined Senator Claire McCaskill (D-MO) to co-sponsor legislation that would overturn two key provisions of

the *Ensuring Patient Access and Effective Drug Enforcement Act of 2016* that have made it more difficult for DEA to intervene in situations involving suspicious activity.



“I’m joining with Senator Claire McCaskill to reverse a policy that has made it harder for the DEA to go after pharmaceutical companies and distributors that are failing to prevent misuse of their highly addictive opioid drugs” said Durbin. “We have tens of thousands of Americans dying every year because of prescription opioid and heroin overdoses. Drug companies have been complicit in this epidemic—peddling misinformation about their drugs and encouraging overuse. We need strong laws on the books that help our federal agencies quickly and effectively respond to this deadly crisis. Unfortunately, thanks to a law passed by Congress, the DEA has been hamstrung in their ability to respond. Hopefully we can right this wrong. At the same time, we also need to address the spigot that is fueling this crisis: the annual opioid production quotas set by the DEA that remain far too high.”

According to former DEA officials cited in *The Washington Post* report, the *Ensuring Patient Access and Effective Drug Enforcement Act of 2016* changed the evidentiary threshold that the DEA needed to meet to a harder standard when seeking to suspend drug companies’ registration. It also created a mechanism for the pharmaceutical industry and distributors to submit a corrective action plan instead of being subject to a suspension order, if their activities were contributing to the diversion of drugs.

Over the past 25 years, the number of opioid pain relievers dispensed in the United States has skyrocketed—from 76 million prescriptions in 1991 to more than 245 million prescriptions in 2014. The increase in opioid-related overdose deaths has mirrored the dramatic rise in opioid prescribing, with more than 33,000 deaths in 2015, a nearly three-fold increase since 2002. In Illinois, there were 1,835 overdose deaths in 2015, a 16 percent increase in just two years. At the same time, according to the U.S. Surgeon General’s Report, *Facing Addiction in America*, only 10 percent of the 21 million Americans suffering with a substance use disorder receive specialty care.