

# Rep. Duffy: Rural relief members lay out priorities to combat opioid crisis

Posted on Wednesday, Apr 25, 2018

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

Mark Bednar; 202-738-0744

Washington DC – Wisconsin Congressman Sean Duffy, Chairman of the Financial Services Subcommittee on Housing & Insurance, today with nine other members of the Rural Relief Initiative, sent a letter to House Energy & Commerce Chairman Greg Walden, urging him to consider specific policy solutions to the opioid crisis in rural America.

Read the letter below.

Chairman Walden,

We write to support your efforts to address the alarming and outstanding needs of rural communities in the wake of a growing opioid crisis in the United States. We thank you and commend your tremendous work investigating strategies and best practices for combatting opioid abuse. As you continue to explore legislative solutions in the coming months, we ask that you please keep our support for the unique needs of rural communities in mind.

As you may know, the signatories to this letter represent members of the House Rural Relief Initiative, which was launched in October 2017 to shed light on and advocate for the struggling Americans in our nation's rural communities. Our membership consists of leaders representing diverse rural constituencies across the United States, from Maine to California, and Texas to Wisconsin.

Unfortunately, that means our constituents are often hit the hardest by opioid abuse and addiction. As reported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in October 2017, the rates of drug overdose deaths are rising in rural areas,

surpassing rates in urban areas. The National Institute on Drug Abuse, USDA Economic Research Service, the National Farmers Union, the American Farm Bureau Federation, and many others have all reported similar trends. One particularly alarming study found that as many as 74 percent of farmers have been directly impacted by the opioid crisis.

With this in mind, we believe it is of paramount importance to give special consideration to rural Americans. We understand that you have identified a range of priorities that will effect positive change in our communities, several of which could greatly increase resources for rural communities:

- Ensuring equitable distribution of resources to address the opioid epidemic in rural populations, including tribal communities (Tribal Addiction and Recovery Act, Improving Access to Remote Behavioral Health Treatment Act, Use of Telehealth to Treat Opioid Use Disorder, Federal Opioid Response Fairness Act);
- Requiring the Drug Enforcement Agency to modernize its controlled substance analogue policies to address synthetics loopholes (SITSA Act, SOFA Act, Synthetic Drug Awareness Act);
- Providing comprehensive addiction and recovery services to directly address rural workforce shortages (Limited repeal of the IMD exclusion for adult Medicaid Beneficiaries with substance abuse disorder);
- Improving ways to safely dispose of controlled substances, both inside and outside the healthcare setting (FDA packaging and disposal, Safe Disposal and Unused Medication Act);
- Combatting overprescribing in rural America through updated prescription guidelines and best practices for prescription drug monitoring programs (Empowering Pharmacists in the Fight Against Opioid Abuse Act; Medicaid PARTNERSHIP Act); and
- Addressing family addiction to end generational drug use, which can lead to high rates of foster care admissions.

While no single policy will completely solve this crisis, the above proposals could have significant impact on reducing rural opioid abuse. Rural communities require more resources and different approaches than urban and suburban communities,

and it's time that our laws reflect this reality.

Thank you for your consideration, and for your strong commitment to combatting the opioid crisis. We look forward to working with you to guarantee that rural communities receive the attention and resources they need during these difficult times.

Background:

For a PDF of the letter with signatures from nine other members of the Rural Relief Initiative, click [HERE](#).

To learn more about the Rural Relief Initiative, please click [HERE](#).