

Preventing Youth Substance Abuse Act

Substance Abuse Affected Youth Initiative

Cosponsors: Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA), Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX), Ann Kuster (D-NH), Don Bacon (R-NE), Bill Foster (D-IL), David Trone (D-MD), Paul Tonko (D-NY), Seth Moulton (D-MA), Gerald E. Connolly (D-VA), Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC), Tony Cárdenas (D-CA), Katherine Clark (D-MA)

Endorsers: Rise Above Colorado; Tennessee Alliance for Drug Endangered Children- Opioid Initiative, Opioid Task Force of Franklin County and the North Quabbin Region; Boston Public Health Commission.

This bill authorizes the Department of Justice (DOJ) to expand the current Opioid-Affected Youth Initiative (OAYI) to address substance abuse affected youth more broadly. Administered through the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, this program will support the efforts of states, communities, tribal jurisdictions, nonprofit organizations, for-profit organizations, and institutions of higher education to implement programs and strategies that identify, respond to, treat, and support children, youth, and families impacted by opioids, stimulants, and other substances to ensure public safety.

Opioid misuse has become prevalent among teens. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, opioid-related overdose deaths of people aged 15-24 increased six-fold from 1999 to 2017. In 2017, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration reported that more than 3.3 million people aged 12-25 abused opioids. In 2019, opioids accounted for about 50 percent of the nearly 70,630 drug overdose deaths. In the same year, one in seven high school students reported current prescription opioid misuse.

Since FY18, OAYI has provided grant funding to support 13 program sites across the country that provide integrated services that support youth and families through treatment and recovery and help reduce youth involvement in both the juvenile justice and foster care systems. DOJ has found that training and technical assistance helps grantees analyze data and outcome measures to improve their services. The goal of this initiative is to develop a truly multidisciplinary task force at each program site to collect data that identifies specific areas of concern within that community.

Recognizing that the problem of substance abuse among teens is not limited to opioids, DOJ seeks to expand this program to more broadly address youth affected by substance abuse. Indeed, concerns have grown that the coronavirus pandemic has led to increased substance use among youth. Expanding OAYI to broadly include issues of substance abuse would go towards ameliorating these concerns.