

Resolution on Fighting the Opioid Epidemic

Following decades of opioid abuse and deaths in multiple populations, in 2016 Virginia health officials declared the opioid epidemic a public health emergency. In late 2016, a year in which fatal drug overdoses in the state increased 38 percent over the prior year. State officials attributed the jump to increased abuse of synthetic opioids, heroin, and prescription fentanyl. Drug use is now the leading cause of unnatural death in Virginia: in each of the past four years, more Virginians have died from a drug overdose than from a car accident or gun violence. Officials believe the opioid epidemic has not yet peaked.

Governor McAuliffe, members of both parties in the state legislature, and the Virginia Board of Medicine have recently taken some steps to address the crisis. Most significantly, they have expanded the availability of an overdose treatment, naloxone, and have issued information and guidelines for the prescribing of opioids by medical practitioners in the state. But the availability of illegal opioids, including highly dangerous synthetics, is increasing. Unless more is done, more Virginians will die from opioid abuse.

The underlying causes of opioid abuse vary, but they include the easy availability of the drugs; misleading marketing to health-care providers by some pharmaceutical companies; the over-prescribing of opioids for pain – leading to addiction and continuing, illegal use when prescriptions expire; economic hardship and the despair that can accompany it; and the lack of adequate treatment and rehabilitation services. Virginia should address all of these problems.

Therefore, be it resolved that the 2017 8th Congressional District Democratic Convention:
Encourages strict enforcement of existing laws regulating the manufacture and distribution of addictive opioids, as well as the following actions:

- Law enforcement should assist drug manufacturers in their internal investigations of possible overprescribing and counterfeiting of opioid drugs,
- Virginia health officials should continue to provide guidance to medical professionals about the appropriate medical use of opioids following guidelines published by the CDC, and should monitor and periodically publish statistics on the volume of opioids prescribed in the state,
- Virginia should establish and fully fund expanded treatment and rehabilitation programs for opioid abuse to ensure that opioid addiction is properly viewed as a public health issue rather than simply leading to increased incarceration rates.
- Virginia should establish and fully fund expanded economic, educational, and social programs designed to relieve systemic causes of addiction, including, but not limited to long-term unemployment and under-employment.