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**Sen. Bob Casey talks opioid epidemic, PA impact, and policy solutions at Penn State
roundtable discussion with state health officials**

STATE COLLEGE, Penn. – Sen. Bob Casey joined PA Health Secretary Dr. Rachel Levine, PA Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs Secretary Jennifer Smith, and Commonwealth Prevention Alliance President Debby Fyre for an opioid epidemic roundtable at Penn State on Tuesday. The discussion, moderated by Dr. Craig Hillemeier, Dean of the Penn State College of Medicine, focused on the intersection of law enforcement and public health policy, methods for identifying communities at risk, and the strategic deployment of resources to support local efforts for combatting drug addiction. The event was attended by 400 students, health professionals, and members of the community brought together by the common desire to learn more about the issue.

Throughout the evening, a common theme was the importance of robust healthcare that is readily available to all, including seniors, people with disabilities, and other underrepresented populations. “The opioid epidemic has a disproportionate impact on communities that are rural, working class, or home to more people of color, so we must not divert resources away from where they are badly needed,” Sen. Casey said, adding that “we’ve seen repeated attacks from Republicans on Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act. If they get the chance to repeal it, they will drastically cut services that those affected by the opioid epidemic rely on every single day.”

Sec. Levine echoed Casey’s concerns about the effectiveness of the state’s public health response. “The opioid crisis cost Pennsylvania \$53 billion in 2016 alone. At this point, we simply can’t afford to ignore the problem, which is why we’ve already taken extensive steps to address it, but more still needs to be done.”

The roundtable panelists also discussed preventative measures such as education that can help stem the tide of addiction by encouraging young people to become better informed about the issue. Attendees agreed that devoting more resources to educating people should be a priority in addressing the situation.

“From dealing with thousands of patients, I’ve always dealt with the more personal and hands-on side of drug overdose, but I’ve never truly recognized the scale of the overall opioid epidemic until now,” local registered nurse Kathy Bowers said. “Clearly this problem is bigger than people can handle on their own, and I’m glad to see that our leaders are taking it seriously.”

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