

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 15, 2016

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor-HHS-Education
Appropriations Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor-HHS-Education
Appropriations Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Vice Chairwoman
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairmen Cochran and Blunt, Vice Chairwoman Mikulski and Ranking Member Murray:

With overdose deaths from prescription opioid painkillers and related heroin use at epidemic levels across the country, we urge you to provide increased funding for opioid abuse programs within the jurisdiction of the Senate Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies (Labor-HHS-Ed) Appropriations Subcommittee. Enhanced funding for programs that aim to reduce opioid deaths, prevent addiction and improve treatment is critical to help break the cycle of addiction, prevent overdose deaths, and help individuals suffering with an opioid use disorder achieve recovery.

Opioid related fatal overdoses continue to grow at an alarming pace. And, more Americans now die every year from drug overdoses than motor vehicle crashes across the country. In 2014, there were 28,647, overdose deaths attributed to prescription opioid painkillers and heroin -- an increase of 309 percent since 2002. Heroin deaths alone skyrocketed in 2014, with rates quadrupling since 2000.¹ Drug overdoses are driving up death rates such that every day, 44 people in the United States die from overdose of prescription painkillers and even more become addicted.² We must do better to protect our communities from this deadly epidemic.

Research has shown that four out of five heroin users started out by misusing prescription painkillers, usually obtained from a family member or friend.³ The United States is the number one consumer of opioids, consuming 80 percent of the world's opioids, despite the fact that we are home to only 5 percent of the world's population.⁴ While these medications provide legitimate relief to patients

¹ CDC Data. Number and age adjusted rates of drug poisoning deaths involving opioid analgesics and heroin: United States 2000-2014 [online] (2014) <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6450a3.htm>

² <http://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/epidemic/public.html>

³ The White House Office of the Press Secretary. Fact Sheet October 21, 2015 online: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/10/21/fact-sheet-obama-administration-announces-public-and-private-sector-and-white-house-media-national-survey-shows-friends-and-family-are-primary-sources-of-abused-painkillers>

⁴ All Gov. "U.S.: 5% of World Population; 80% of Opioid Consumption [online] (2010) <http://www.allgov.com/news/controversies/us-5-percent-of-world-population-80-percent-of-opioid-consumption-141215?news=855100>

suffering from extreme pain, such as those battling cancer, the number of opioid prescriptions has skyrocketed and there are concerns that many physicians lack access to updated tools and guidance on how to safely prescribe these medications. In addition, syringe use among those with an opioid use disorder has also driven new surges in transmission of Hepatitis C virus and HIV across the country.

Recognizing this crisis, President Obama has included in his Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 budget a request of \$1.1 billion to address opioid abuse by expanding access to treatment and recovery services for those with substance use disorders. This critical investment across agencies at the Department of Health and Human Services would bolster state efforts to expand treatment capacity, strengthen the substance use and recovery workforce, enhance access to medication-assisted treatment programs, improve overdose response services, and support initiatives to prevent abuse and addiction. We support such a call for a strong funding increase and emphasize the need for federal agencies to work together to respond with urgency and purpose. Investing in better prescription monitoring, education, awareness and prevention efforts combined with improved access to overdose reversal drugs and effective treatment and recovery services are all activities that can combat this epidemic.

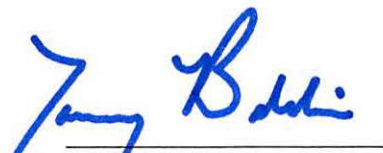
Without significant investments that reflect the magnitude of this crisis, this country will be at a disadvantage in stemming the tide of opioid overdoses and breaking the cycle of addiction that is ravaging families and communities in every corner of the nation.

Therefore, we urge you to increase federal investment in addressing opioid misuse and abuse in your FY 2017 appropriations bill and further ask that you work with us to support efforts to reduce overdose deaths, to prevent addiction and to improve treatment and recovery services for those with opioid use disorders.

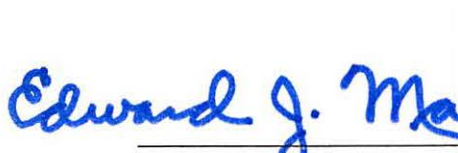
We appreciate your consideration of our request and understand the difficult decisions your Subcommittee will face in this fiscal climate. Using the President's budget request as a framework, we have an opportunity to significantly fight back against the public health crisis that has gripped the country.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Robert Menendez
United States Senator

Tom Carper

Tom Carper
United States Senator

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Angus King

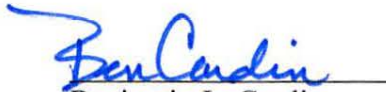
Angus S. King, Jr.
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Richard Blumenthal
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Mark R. Warner
United States Senator



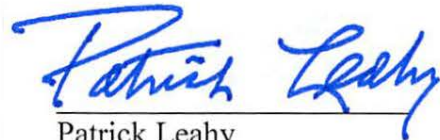
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Bernard Sanders
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Al Franken
United States Senator

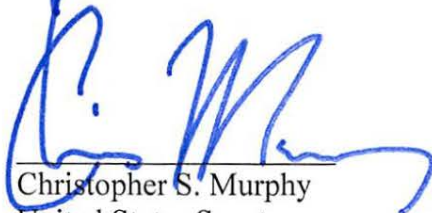


Patrick Leahy
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

Joe Manchin III
United States Senator



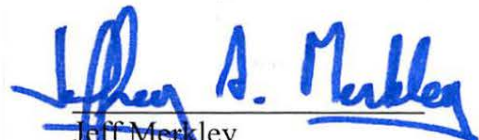
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Jeff Merkley
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
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