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WASHINGTON, DC 20510

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The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
United States Senate Committee on
Appropriations
Washington D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman
United States Senate Committee on
Appropriations
Washington D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Cochran and Vice Chairman Leahy,

I write to request that you move expeditiously to allocate funding for critical substance use disorder treatment and prevention services as authorized through the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018. Sadly, this sweeping public health tsunami has shown no sign of abating in Connecticut, which now ranks 11th among the national drug overdose mortality rate.¹

Such funding should focus on evidence-based programs that support proven mental health services, prevention, and treatment, while also ensuring that first responders are adequately equipped with life-saving naloxone and trained in core harm reduction principles. In light of this dramatically escalating and dire trend of death and addiction, I urge the Appropriations Committee to move expeditiously so federal agencies can quickly disperse robust, much-needed supports and services to communities throughout Connecticut who have been fighting bravely on the frontlines of the heroin and opioid crisis.

Connecticut has experienced a dramatic spike in opioid and fentanyl related deaths in recent years. According to a recent report released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the rate of deaths from synthetic opioids in Connecticut, including those from fentanyl, increased by 125 percent from 2014 to 2015. This stunning statistic represents the second-highest percentage increase among the twenty-eight states included in CDC's study.² Moreover, Connecticut's Chief Medical Examiner, Dr. James Gill, reported that an average of nearly three Connecticut residents die each day from drug overdose, and, worse yet, the state was on pace to eclipse 1,000 opioid-related deaths by the end of 2017, marking the sixth straight year

¹ CDC. "Drug Overdose Mortality by State." *Center For Disease Control and Prevention*. Accessed February 16, 2018. https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/sosmap/drug_poisoning_mortality/drug_poisoning.htm.

² Rondinone, Nicholas. "CDC: Connecticut Second In Percent Increase Of Synthetic Opioid Deaths Rate." *Hartford Courant* (Hartford, CT), January 6, 2017, Web. Accessed February 16, 2018. <http://www.courant.com/breaking-news/hc-cdc-fentanyl-overdoses-20170105-story.html>.

with an increase.³ The many lives lost have left an indelible void in countless communities across Connecticut; filling families with sorrow and pushing many already overburdened social service programs to the brink of exhaustion.

I have been deeply inspired by the exceedingly resilient women and men who battle the impacts of opioid addiction every day. I have met with the experienced, devoted individuals and groups throughout the state, including substance use disorder specialists, law enforcement agents, elected officials, families, people struggling with addiction, and many more. All of which have described in great detail their innovative, life-saving work to slow the deluge of addiction sweeping the state, despite severely limited resources. The Connecticut state legislature has enacted several proposals seeking to curb the opioid epidemic, including measures to expand access to overdose-reversing medical products, like naloxone, and training for prescribers, among others. In addition, the state backs up these strong, evidence-based proposals with real funding – disbursing over \$65 million a year on treatment for opioid dependency.⁴ Yet still, funding issues remain – treatment centers that simply do not have enough beds to meet the demand, or rehabilitation facilities that are unable to hire enough qualified staff due to budget constraints. In April 2016, I released a comprehensive report entitled, “Opioid Addiction: A Call to Action,” informed by the exceptional work and inspirational stories I heard throughout the state. This detailed report outlined Connecticut’s exemplary response to the rising tide of addiction to provide a policy roadmap to assist ongoing efforts at the federal and state level to combat opioid misuse nationwide. However, one common theme remained – without sustained federal support these proven programs and services can only hope to slow this public health hurricane.

Congress has recently taken steps to meet the growing demand for robust supports and services in our state and local communities. The Bipartisan Budget Act provides \$6 billion over a two-year period to combat the opioid and heroin epidemic by enhancing the capacity of state grants and public prevention initiatives related to substance misuse and mental health programs. I am proud to support this law, which will rightly provide additional assistance for states – like Connecticut – with high mortality rates. Before that, the 21st Century Cures Act provided a substantial down payment in the fight against the opioid epidemic; delivering funds to expand prevention and education programs, improve the availability of naloxone for first responders, and bolster efforts at the state level to track diversion. The passage of the Comprehensive Addiction

³ Constable, Kyle. "Opioid crisis deepens as Malloy again signs legislation to curb it." *The CT Mirror* (Hartford, CT), August 31, 2017, Health Care. Accessed February 16, 2018. <https://ctmirror.org/2017/08/31/opioid-crisis-deepens-as-malloy-again-signs-legislation-to-curb-it/>.

⁴ Hernandez, Esteban. "<https://www.nhregister.com/health/article/Connecticut-rolls-out-new-strategy-to-combat-11327462.php>." *New Haven Register* (New Haven, CT), October 6, 2016, Health. Accessed February 16, 2018. <https://www.nhregister.com/health/article/Connecticut-rolls-out-new-strategy-to-combat-11327462.php>.

and Recovery Act also enacted a number of policies to provide states and local governments with additional tools to address the ongoing epidemic.

I ask that appropriators build on this progress by committing to address addiction as a matter of public health. It is through this lens that those struggling with addiction – mothers, fathers, daughters, brothers, and our veterans – will have access to the high-quality, culturally competent services they so desperately need on the road to recovery. Indeed, President Trump’s Commission on Combating Drug Addiction and The Opioid Crisis’ report clearly states that “research has shown that integrating culturally-based solutions into evidence-based treatment and recovery programs is a best practice and improves treatment outcomes.”⁵ Therefore, I request that the state of Connecticut receives a fair, robust allocation of funds under the Bipartisan Budget Act in order to expand various treatment, prevention, and recovery programs that provide critical medication-assisted treatment, counseling, and other residential services. These proven, lifesaving programs should be available to all individuals suffering from addiction.

Congress must move without delay to disburse these funds to those on the front lines of the heroin and opioid epidemic. We must also recognize that federal government’s work is not done, and that we must do more to rid our communities of the corrosive grip of substance use disorder. There is no question that these heartbreaking statistics underscore the heavy toll this epidemic has taken across the state of Connecticut; however, the many powerful stories of resilience and strength that I have witnessed firsthand give me hope that with additional supports and services, at the right time, we can begin to reverse this alarming trend. I look forward to continuing our work together to combat this unrelenting epidemic, and appreciate your steadfast commitment to this issue that affects so many across the country.

Sincerely,



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senate

⁵ Executive The President's Commission On Combatting Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis. *The President's Commission On Combatting Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis*. By Chris Christie, Charlie Baker, Roy Cooper, Patrick J. Kennedy, Bertha Madras, and Pam Bondi. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, n.d. Accessed February 16, 2018.
https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/images/Final_Report_Draft_11-15-2017.pdf.

Cc: The Honorable Roy Blunt, Chairman

Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies

The Honorable Patty Murray, Ranking Member

Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies