

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 5, 2017

The Honorable Donald Trump
President of the United States of America
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, Northwest
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Trump,

We were encouraged by your recent announcement to establish a commission to address the growing opioid epidemic – an effort that we hope will build on the bipartisan steps taken by Congress in the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act and 21st Century Cures Act. Democrats are ready to work on bipartisan health policies that improve care for those who need it most, especially individuals with substance use disorders. However, we are concerned that despite your stated interest in combatting the opioid epidemic, you and your Administration have supported policies that would strip health care from millions, reduce the funds states receive to treat those struggling with addiction, and cut funding to critical agencies addressing substance use disorders. Therefore, we are requesting your commitment that as part of your efforts to address the opioid epidemic, you will reverse course on any proposal to repeal the Affordable Care Act (ACA) or undermine efforts, to expand health insurance coverage, strengthen consumer protections and guarantee access to mental health and substance use disorder services. In particular, we are concerned that your budget proposal would cut critical resources that are being used each day to fight this epidemic.

As you likely know, the number of overdose deaths in the United States have consistently and continuously risen, leaving heartbroken families and struggling communities in its wake.¹ In fact, the opioid epidemic killed more people in 2015 than HIV/AIDS did at its peak and caused more deaths than car accidents and gun homicides combined.² That is why it is imperative that any legislative or executive action that impacts health care address the implications on those struggling with addiction.

Unfortunately, your most recent actions on health care reflect a step backward on substance use disorder and addiction. The American Health Care Act (AHCA) – which you supported and failed to get passed through a Republican-led Congress – would have been a disaster for many seeking substance use disorder treatment. It would have essentially eliminated Essential Health Benefits requirements, which require insurers to provide mental health and substance use disorder services for Medicaid expansion beneficiaries and enrollees in the

¹ Abuse, National Institute on Drug. "Overdose Death Rates." NIDA. N.p., 06 Jan. 2017. Web. 05 Apr. 2017.

² Frostenson, German Lopez and Sarah. "How the opioid epidemic became America's worst drug crisis ever, in 15 maps and charts." Vox. Vox, 23 Mar. 2017. Web. 05 Apr. 2017.

individual and small group insurance markets. This could cause an estimated 2.8 million Americans with a substance use disorder to lose care.³

The AHCA would have also spelled disaster for Medicaid, repealing all funding for the expansion authorized by the ACA, removing protections that allow people to receive mental and behavioral health care services for the expansion population, and leaving nearly 1.3 million at risk of losing their coverage. Eliminating funding for the Medicaid expansion would cost our country \$4.5 billion in funds for mental health and substance use disorder treatment, leaving many to be denied these services or, even worse, denied coverage altogether.

Your Administration has also proposed drastic budget cuts that would reduce federal resources playing a critical role in combating opioid abuse and addiction. By recklessly suggesting that the National Institutes of Health (NIH) budget be slashed by \$5.8 billion, you are jeopardizing important programs under its umbrella that seek to combat the opioid epidemic, like research into abuse-deterrent opioids at the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) or alternative pain management methods at the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH). Your budget proposal would also slash public health programs, like those at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that prevent opioid overdose deaths. Your most recent proposal for Fiscal Year 2017 even proposed cutting the Community Mental Health Services Block Grant by nearly 20 percent.

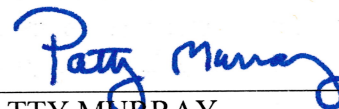
While we appreciate any and all sincere efforts to address the opioid epidemic, it is impossible to fight this pernicious disease with new solutions on one hand while consistently weakening efforts that are already working with the other. In an effort to better understand the seriousness of your commitment to this cause, it is our hope that you will support policies that increase affordable access to health care, protect all Medicaid beneficiaries, maintain important consumer protections that guarantee the coverage of mental health and substance use disorder services, and provide robust resources to federal agencies working towards solutions.

We are eager to work together to combat the opioid epidemic, if you are willing to stop undermining the ACA and existing bipartisan programs that are working to address this deadly epidemic. We request that you provide us with plans on how you will engage with stakeholders in carrying out your executive order and how you intend to implement and fund the programs established by Congress last year.

Sincerely,



RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senate



PATTY MURRAY
United States Senate

³ Richard G. Frank and Sherry A. Glied. "Keep Obamacare to keep progress on treating opioid disorders and mental illnesses." *TheHill*. N.p., 11 Jan. 2017. Web. 05 Apr. 2017.



SHERROD BROWN
United States Senate



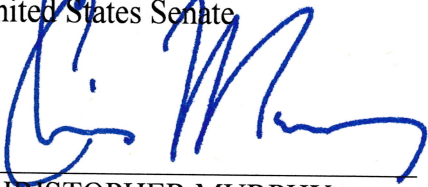
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