

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

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The Honorable Loretta E. Lynch
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, Northwest
Washington, D.C. 20350

The Honorable Sylvia Mathews Burwell
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, Southwest
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Attorney General Lynch and Secretary Burwell,

I am writing to request that you coordinate rapid distribution of the opioid funding recently authorized through the 21st Century Cures Act. These new funds would allow states that have been hit the hardest to begin aggressively fighting back against the opioid and heroin epidemic sweeping our nation. Despite the best efforts of those on the ground, far too many families in Connecticut have felt the devastating depths of this public health crisis. As the opioid epidemic continues to spread, I urge the federal agencies tasked with distributing these funds to ensure that Connecticut receives a fair and ample allocation.

In Connecticut, we have seen drug overdose deaths skyrocket to approximately 2,000 between the years 2012 and 2015.¹ For instance, Connecticut's Chief Medical Examiner, James Gill, indicates that heroin deaths increased by 27 percent and fentanyl deaths by 148 percent from 2014 to 2015.² Worse yet, Connecticut is on pace to surpass last year's record high number of opioid overdoses, with 528 projected by the end of 2016.³ These deaths have ravishing effects on families and communities as median overdose death rates in Connecticut's rural communities continue to rise and its major cities are hardest hit. I have spoken to many on the front lines of this epidemic – law enforcement, mental health professionals, first responders, and many others– who have told me that they simply lack the resources needed to make any real progress in combating this growing epidemic.

In the face of these startling numbers, Connecticut's countless first responders, law enforcement agents, substance use disorder specialists, families, and people struggling with addiction have been forced to manage severely limited resources to mobilize against opioid misuse and abuse.

¹ Tran, Andrew Ba. "Why Connecticut's Drug Overdose Crisis Isn't Slowing down." Opioid Epidemic. N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Dec. 2016, <http://overdose.trendct.org/>.

² Altimari, Dave. "Heroin-Related Overdose Deaths Soar In Connecticut." *Hartford Courant*. N.p., 14 Feb. 2016. Web. 13 Dec. 2016, <http://www.courant.com/news/connecticut/hc-2015-heroin-deaths-increase-20160214-story.html>.

³ Hernandez, Esteban L. "Connecticut Medical Examiner's Office Projects Nearly 900 Fatal Drug Overdoses in State for 2016." *New Haven Register*, 02 Sept. 2016. Web. 13 Dec. 2016, <http://www.nhregister.com/general-news/20160902/connecticut-medical-examiners-office-projects-nearly-900-fatal-drug-overdoses-in-state-for-2016>.

Connecticut treatment providers have responded to the opioid crisis by increasing their capacity to provide methadone treatment by nearly 30% between 2011 and 2015.⁴ Furthermore, our state spends over \$65 million on treatment for opioid dependency, showing the state's willingness to use all available funding to combat this deadly problem.⁵ This data, personified by their personal insight and powerful stories of resilience served as the foundation for a comprehensive report I released in April entitled, "Opioid Addiction: A Call to Action". This report includes a detailed policy strategy that can be implemented at the federal and state level to curb opioid abuse and addiction both in Connecticut and nationwide. However, those who I spoke with at the state level consistently noted that these goals could not be completed without robust federal support and resources.

The passage of the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (CARA) marked a crucial step towards implementing some of these important policy changes. And now, with the 21st Century Cures Act, Congress has provided real, immediate funding that would help states and local organizations carry out the proven programs and services authorized in CARA. These new funds will have a profound impact on this epidemic. They may be used to expand prevention and educational efforts, improve the availability of naloxone for first responders, and provide resources to identify individuals suffering from addiction in the criminal justice system. The funds can also be used for the launch of a treatment and intervention program to expand best practices and strengthen PDMPs to track diversion and help at-risk individuals to access services. In allocating the funding recently made available efficiently, it is important to acknowledge addiction as a matter of public health. It is our hope that all individuals suffering from addiction will be eligible to the health and social services afforded by this funding.

Congress has acted to support the robust framework laid out in CARA. This insidious epidemic will require a unified response from the federal government. Like many of my colleagues, I have heard from countless families who have tragically lost loved ones to addiction. I ask that you keep those families in mind and take this opportunity to ensure that the people in Connecticut struggling with heroin, opioid, and drug addiction are provided with adequate supports and services. I look forward to continuing our work together to address this critically important issue facing our nation.

Sincerely,



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senate

CC:

Health Resources and Service Administration
Acting Administrator James Macrae, MA, MPP

Office of National Drug Control Policy
Director, Michael Botticelli

⁴ Bennett, Helen. "The Connecticut Opioid REsponse Initiative." *The Office of Governor Dannel P. Malloy*, 05 Oct. 2016. Web. 13 Dec. 2016, https://www.scribd.com/document/326676147/Opioids-Connecticut-2016-10-06-Core-Initiative#download&from_embed.

⁵ Hernandez, Esteban L. "Connecticut Rolls out New Strategy to Combat Opioid Addiction, Overdoses and Deaths." *New Haven Register*, 06 Oct. 2016. Web. 13 Dec. 2016, <http://www.nhregister.com/health/20161006/connecticut-rolls-out-new-strategy-to-combat-opioid-addiction-overdoses-and-deaths>.