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## United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION,  
LABOR, AND PENSIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6300

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<http://help.senate.gov>

December 17, 2014

Jewel Mullen, MD, MPH, MPA  
President  
The Association of State and Territorial Health Officials  
2231 Crystal Drive, Suite 450  
Arlington, VA 22202

Georgia Heise, DrPH  
President  
National Association of County and City Health Officials  
1100 17th Street, NW, Seventh Floor  
Washington, DC 20036

Dear Dr. Mullen and Dr. Heise:

We are writing for two reasons: first, we would like to thank you for your participation in the bipartisan HELP Committee working group examining prescription drug abuse in the United States; second, we write to ask that you keep the committee informed of your continuing efforts to address this epidemic.

Prescription drug abuse is a public health crisis that has increased dramatically in scope during recent years. Drug overdose death rates in the United States have more than tripled since 1990. The most recent data shows that more than 16,000 lives are lost each year due to opioid-related overdoses. In 2011, almost 2 million people reported using prescription opioids non-medically for the first time—nearly 5,500 people a day.

As the Senate committee with jurisdiction over public health matters, we have been closely examining this problem and potential solutions through a bipartisan HELP Committee working group. Throughout this effort, we held numerous briefings on a broad range of topics in order to 1) learn more about the characteristics of the prescription drug abuse epidemic; 2) study what local, state, and federal governments and a range of non-governmental entities are doing to address prescription drug abuse; and 3) explore potential solutions to this problem.

State and local public health officials are actively working to address this public health crisis. The work your members have initiated to improve primary and secondary prevention programs, enhance surveillance, build partnerships with law enforcement, and broaden access to treatment is having a positive impact on communities across our nation. We look forward to following

We have heard from you and many of your members about the challenges providers face responding to the prescription drug abuse epidemic. The American Medical Association and Association of American Medical Colleges play a critical role in supporting continued access to the training and education that medical professionals need to manage their patients' pain, ensure that patients get the best care possible, and recognize and treat abuse and addiction when necessary.

We also have heard from you and many of your members that Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs (PDMPs) are a useful tool, but that there are some limitations. Increasing the effectiveness of PDMP tools is important for ensuring both that patients receive appropriate pain management, and that addiction is recognized and treated as quickly as possible. We thank you and your members for the input to date on ways to improve PDMPs, and hope that this continues.

We greatly appreciate your efforts to address prescription drug abuse and your continued work on ending this epidemic. With our shared goal of preventing and reducing prescription drug abuse in this country – a crisis that demands continued action, we expect that your activities in this area will continue, and we stand ready to assist you. We request that you provide updates to us early next year about your ongoing work, as we continue to explore potential solutions to this problem. Again, thank you for your commitment to this issue.

Sincerely,



Tom Harkin  
Chairman



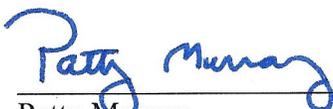
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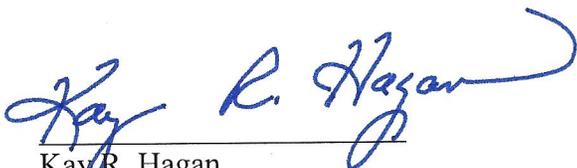
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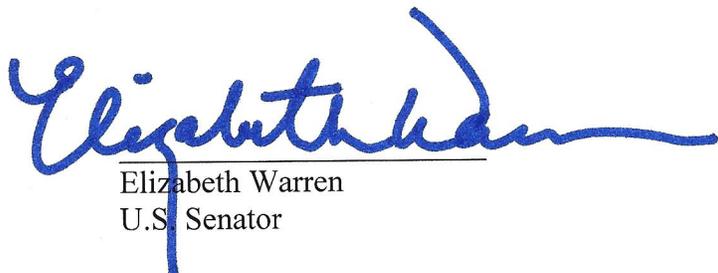
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