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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION,
LABOR, AND PENSIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6300

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May 8, 2017

Mr. Richard Baum
Acting Director
Office of National Drug Control Policy
750 17th St. N.W.
Washington, DC 20006

Dear Mr. Baum,

Thank you for your recent letter requesting input on the Trump Administration's first *National Drug Control Strategy*. Substance use, misuse, and use disorders, especially opioid and illicit drug addiction, remain a serious issue for our country. The number of deaths from overdose are on the rise¹ and now exceeds deaths resulting from motor vehicles accidents and firearms combined.² We appreciate any sincere efforts to combat substance use disorders. We are concerned that this Administration may revert to a policy that focuses on the criminal justice system over public health efforts. Furthermore, we are concerned about the sincerity of this Administration's efforts in general as President Trump recently proposed to cut the Office of National Drug Control Policy's (ONDCP) budget by 95 percent for fiscal year 2018. We agree with the unnamed source within ONDCP who was recently quoted in the media as saying that these cuts are like, "removing the tip of the spear."

During the Obama Administration, we made huge strides towards treating those with drug addiction in a humane, patient-centered, and compassionate way – and the vast majority of this work was bipartisan. The funding provided by the 21st Century Cures Act, the programs established under the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (CARA), including improvements to pain management and opioid prescribing practices for veterans, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) block grants and competitive grants, the mental health parity law, and the Affordable Care Act's (ACA) essential health benefits all play critical and complementary roles in responding to the opioid and illicit drug epidemic in a productive way. Unfortunately, the current Administration has threatened many of these programs, failing to propose funding for CARA's new programs that would help our local communities, threatening to cut SAMHSA's mental health block grant by 20 percent, and pushing for the repeal of the ACA's essential health benefits. A meaningful effort to combat

¹ <https://www.drugabuse.gov/related-topics/trends-statistics/overdose-death-rates>

² <http://www.vox.com/science-and-health/2017/3/23/14987892/opioid-heroin-epidemic-charts>

substance use disorders must focus on the full implementation of CARA, adequate funding for SAMHSA, and improving the Affordable Care Act by expanding access to mental health and substance use disorder services and health insurance.

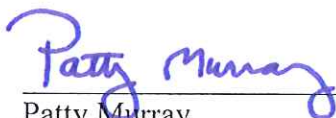
The Administration's continued support of the American Health Care Act (AHCA) would be a major step backwards in the prevention and treatment of drug addiction. This bill would undermine the treatment of addiction by drastically increasing the number of uninsured and limiting the availability of mental and behavioral health services for those lucky enough to maintain coverage. Under the AHCA, an estimated 24 million people would lose their insurance. In addition, the AHCA will do away with the ACA's essential health benefits, leaving those suffering from substance use disorder without access to treatment they need. Coupled with an emphasis on the criminalization and the prosecution of those with substance use disorders, we are very concerned that this Administration will exacerbate the opioid epidemic rather than alleviating it.

We are also concerned by the Administration's open hostility to state policies legalizing or decriminalizing the possession and use of medical or recreational marijuana. Particularly given the severity of the ongoing opioid use epidemic, federal resources should be targeted at providing comprehensive substance use disorder programs and cutting off the flow of deadly drugs rather than interfering with state regulatory regimes for marijuana.

We urge you to strike a different tone in the National Drug Control strategy, emphasizing prevention, treatment, and recovery, as Congress did in CARA. The report should include recommendations that the Administration:

- Build on the progress in the recent FY2017 appropriations bill and fully fund the programs established under CARA;
- Provide adequate resources to SAMHSA;
- Strengthen enforcement of the mental health parity and addiction equity law;
- Build on the expansion of mental health and substance use disorder coverage rather than promoting policies that would rip this coverage away from millions of Americans; and
- Continue to fully fund the Office of National Drug Control Policy.

Sincerely,




Patty Murray
U.S. Senator




Sheldon Whitehouse
U.S. Senator



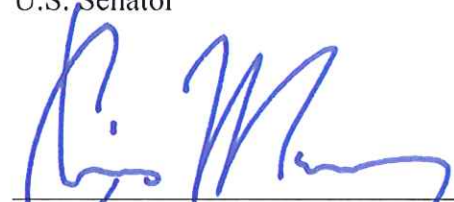
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