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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION,
LABOR, AND PENSIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6300

DEREK MILLER, STAFF DIRECTOR
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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

your activities in this area and we ask that you update the Committee on your successes as well as any barriers to progress that Congress may be able to help you overcome.

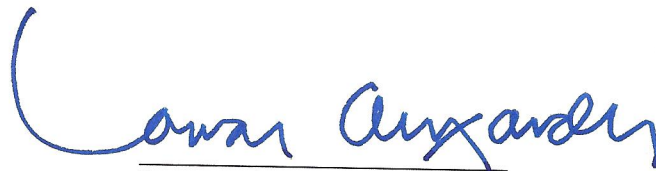
A key theme that emerged throughout our working group discussions was the importance of community-based prevention efforts. As public health officials, you understand that prescription drug abuse is not an issue that can be handled solely by interactions with a physician or deterrence by law enforcement. It is a problem that requires a multi-pronged solution with active participation from many sectors. In addition to treating those already suffering from addiction, we must not forget the importance of preventing Americans from ever experiencing addiction in the first place. Your two organizations have played a leading role in encouraging prevention programs throughout the United States targeting a range of audiences and settings. We hope that you will continue your dedication to increasing awareness about tools and programs that have seen success, helping our communities build on programs that have been proven to work.

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



Lamar Alexander
Ranking Member



Barbara Mikulski
U.S. Senator



Richard Burr
U.S. Senator



Patty Murray
U.S. Senator



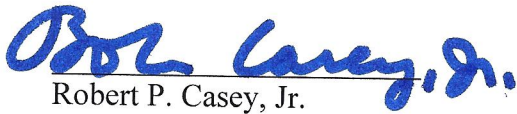
Orrin G. Hatch
U.S. Senator



Bernard Sanders
U.S. Senator



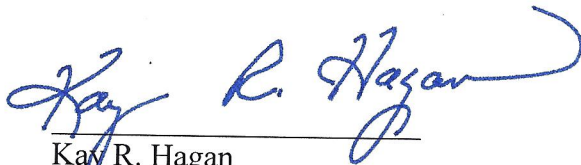
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U.S. Senator



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
U.S. Senator



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U.S. Senator



Kay R. Hagan
U.S. Senator



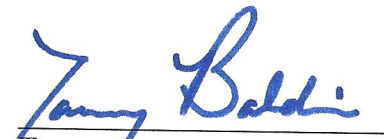
Al Franken
U.S. Senator



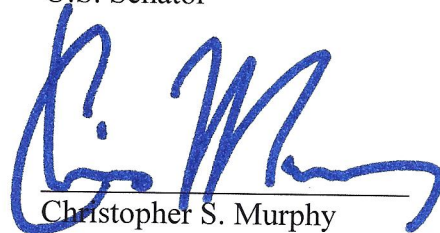
Michael F. Bennet
U.S. Senator



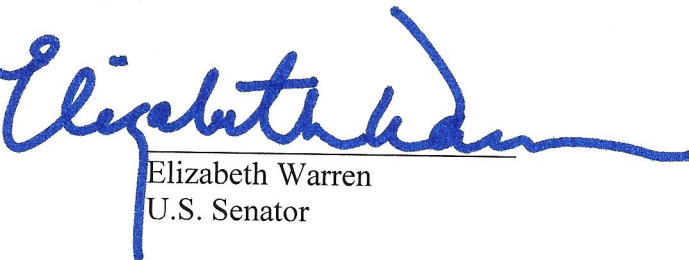
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Christopher S. Murphy
U.S. Senator



Elizabeth Warren
U.S. Senator