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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

Governor John Hickenlooper  
Chair, National Governors Association  
Hall of the States  
444 N. Capitol St., Ste. 267  
Washington, D.C. 20001

Dear Governor Hickenlooper:

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.

Reducing prescription drug abuse and making treatment available for those currently addicted will take work on the federal, state, and local level. The states are leaders in fighting this epidemic, as evidenced by the National Governor's Association (NGA) prescription drug abuse project through the Prescription Drug Abuse Reduction Policy Academy and issue briefs like *Reducing Prescription Drug Abuse: Lessons Learned from an NGA Policy Academy*. These efforts emphasize important work on prevention education, best practices in treatment, and law enforcement tools.

We heard from you and others throughout our working group about many key issues that are areas of shared concern, including the importance of balancing both the need for pain treatment with the dangers of prescription opioid abuse. We look forward to continuing work with you to ensure providers, patients, and the public health community have the tools that they need to

prevent and address prescription drug abuse. Health care providers and pharmacists are on the front lines of dealing with this epidemic, and they must have access to education and resources both for them and to help their patients manage pain and get addiction treatment if necessary. As governors, you play an important role in supporting such access in your states.

Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs (PDMPs) are also a critical tool in preventing prescription drug abuse and identifying patients who may be at risk of abuse or in need of substance abuse treatment. Interoperability of PDMPs would be helpful, but it will require states working together to be done effectively – and we urge you to continue your work in bringing states together on this front.

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



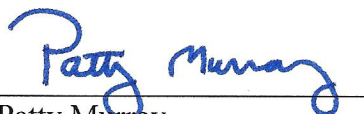
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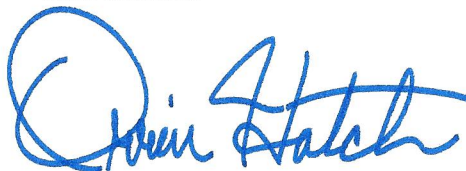
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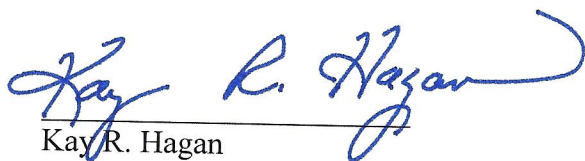
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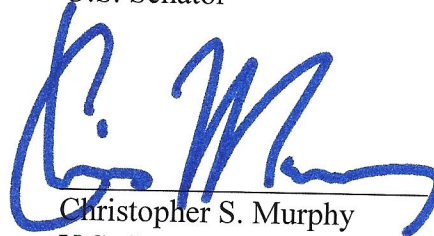
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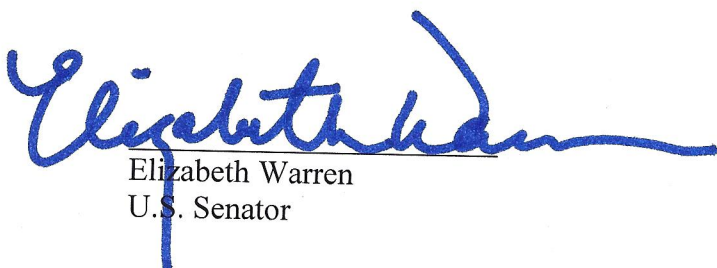
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