

December 17, 2015

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Obama,

As you well know, budgets are the manifestation of policy priorities, not just the allocation of federal dollars. Therefore I urge you to build upon the important work you have already done by increasing funding to address the prescription drug and heroin epidemic in the United States in your budget for the 2017 Fiscal Year.

As you are well aware, addiction to opioids, such as oxycodone, hydrocodone, and heroin is tearing at the fabric of our communities and families and devastating people's lives across the country. According to the most recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, deaths from prescription painkillers rose to 16,000 in 2013, four times higher than the rate in 1999. Each day, there are 44 overdose deaths in the United States. In the State of Maine, the number of people seeking treatment for opiate abuse has risen from 1,115 in 2010 to 3,463 in 2014, and the number of babies born addicted to drugs or alcohol went from 572 to 961, an increase of 68 percent. That's an appalling 961 addicted babies out of 12,000 live births in our state. I appreciate your efforts in addressing this issue, including convening a panel discussion in West Virginia, as well as the inclusion of \$133 million in funding for the departments of Justice and Health and Human Services in your FY 2016 budget, but I believe that the scope and acceleration of this crisis demands even more.

Addressing this epidemic will require a multi-faceted approach, including a strong commitment to prevention, treatment, enforcement and various measures to support communities feeling its acute effects.

Our first line of defense against opioid and heroin abuse is ensuring that we have strong prevention programs. An effective prevention strategy must start with educating children and young adults on the risks associated with using opioids through programs such as Maine's Healthy Communities programs and other initiatives that lower the risk of drug use and support

young people, empowering them to make good decisions. We must also support physicians and other prescribers in making treatment decisions. One of the critical resources for prescribers is Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs (PDMPs). There are currently 51 PDMPs. These programs, according to a recently released report by Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, allow physicians and other prescribers to “have comprehensive controlled substances prescription records for an individual regardless of whether the patient paid cash or filled prescriptions through multiple insurers or pharmacies.” By expanding Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs, prescribers can monitor addiction trends and help mitigate the risk of opioid abuse, misuse and diversion by making informed decisions based on a given patient’s prescription history.

We must also increase prevention funding for plans tailored to certain areas, such as those detailed in the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s *Opioid Overdose Prevention Toolkit*, which gives material to communities and local governments to develop policies and practices to prevent opioid-related overdoses and deaths.

I also urge you to devote significant resources to treatment programs. There is no example that better illustrates this need than that of Michael Fielders, of Eliot, Maine, who died of a suspected heroin overdose in November while awaiting treatment. Michael’s tragic story underscores the need to increase access to a wide range of options and to take an approach that recognizes the unique treatment needs of each person. The window for treatment is narrow, and when a person is ready to begin the process of addressing their dependence on opioids, programs must be available for them.

I hope that the 2017 FY budget can also prioritize comprehensive treatment options, such as Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) programs, which combine the use of proper medications with behavioral therapy and counseling. Funding for programs that provide increased access to buprenorphine and methadone in communities with high rates of addiction and limited treatment options are important as well. As the epidemic continues to grow nationwide, the budget must emphasize the importance of treatment and mobilize resources to help meet the unique needs of so many people.

In addition to both prevention and treatment efforts, we must also ensure that our enforcement strategies meet the unique challenges of drug abuse in our communities and the influx of drugs arriving from abroad. During a Senate Armed Services hearing last week, I raised the importance of clamping down on heroin trafficking with Vice Admiral Kurt Tidd, who you have nominated to be the Commander of the United States Southern Command (SOUTHCOM). If confirmed,

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

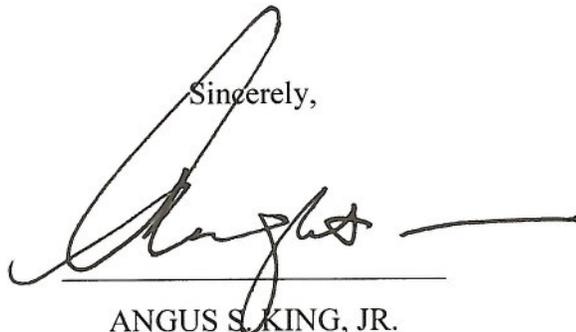
Admiral Tidd will lead our military efforts in Central and South America to mitigate this growing threat. With demand for heroin more than doubling since 2007, it is clear that part of our enforcement strategy must be increasing resources to reduce the flow of heroin from Latin America. Ultimately, the FY 2017 budget should focus upon keeping our communities safe from any crime and violence associated with illicit trade and distribution while also ensuring that we treat non-violent people who need care.

A final aspect to address as you consider the 2017 FY budget is family and community support, whether it be through grants or other means, for those affected by addiction and research on the efficacy of current treatment policies and ways to improve and develop new ones. By increasing funding for both of these objectives, we can help families splintered by the effects of addiction receive support and through research evaluating current federal policies and potential alternative treatment models, we help assure that we are best adapting to this dynamic and complex public health and safety crisis.

By requesting that you build upon the \$133 million devoted to prescription drug and heroin abuse in last year's budget, I recognize that this would require significant resources. However, I am confident that increased funding for the programs I have listed will lead to significant savings in the long run. This will be seen through decreases in emergency care and long-term treatment, as well as a reduction in crime associated with heroin use and distribution. Ultimately, the opioid and heroin crisis we face demands an aggressive approach at the federal level to create lasting solutions on behalf of families and communities in Maine and across the United States.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to working with the Administration on this important issue.

Sincerely,



ANGUS S. KING, JR.
United States Senator

This is fast becoming a major epidemic - All help sincerely appreciated -