

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 16, 2022

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III  
Secretary of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

General Mark A. Milley  
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff  
9999 Joint Staff Pentagon,  
Washington, DC 20318-9999

Dear Secretary Austin and Chairman Milley:

I write to you today to express my growing concern over an alarming trend of the Department of Defense's lack of urgency regarding the transnational drug trade crisis at our borders and the seeming reluctance of the Department to meet its statutory requirement to combat this threat. Every day, two citizens in Maine die of drug-related causes, and more than 100,000 will die nationwide this year.

I acknowledge that we must aggressively pursue the demand problem and seek improved public health solutions, and it is also clear that this is an all-of-government responsibility. However, I have yet to receive a clear answer on what the Department of Defense is doing to improve countering these illegal activities that are killing Americans at an increasingly alarming rate. Since I have been in office, there have been no perceptible improvements on deterring the transnational drug trade; only vague promises and repeated disappointments. Shipments are coming into North America from Latin America both by sea and across the Mexican border, but because of limitations in our capacity to react, only a relatively small percentage of those shipments are ever interdicted, even though in many cases we know of the shipments and their likely routes. The flow of synthetic drugs and precursors from China to Mexico has also played a significant role in the flood of fentanyl into the United States illicit drug market. The February 2022 Annual Threat Assessment from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence states:

*"Illicit drug trafficking by [Transnational Criminal Organizations], particularly synthetic drugs, endangers the health and safety of millions of U.S. citizens and imposes as much as one trillion dollars in direct and indirect economic losses. The threat from illicit drugs is at historic levels, with more than 100,000 American drug-overdose deaths for the first time annually, driven mainly by a robust supply of synthetic opioids from Mexican TCOs."*

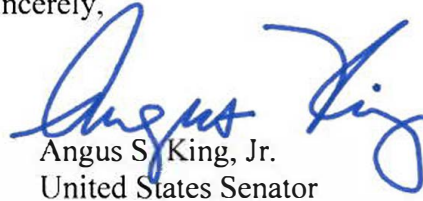
The Department of Defense is the lead agency for this effort as prescribed by 10 U.S.C. 124 and is further supported by 10 U.S.C. 284, 10 U.S.C. 333, 32 U.S.C. 112, and other statutory

authorities. Furthermore, Congress appropriated \$914 million in FY 2021 and most recently \$925 million for FY 2022 for the Department of Defense to conduct drug interdiction and counter-drug operations. Despite the authority and resources, gains have not been made, and our country cannot afford a continuation of these senseless deaths.

The Department needs to immediately address this crisis, re-think its current plans, enter into agreements with partner agencies, and implement a holistic approach to counter this threat with measurable goals and benchmarks. In lieu of a written response, I invite the appropriate officials from the Department to my office to brief me on this critical mission and discuss their plans to execute this mission.

Solving this crisis is imperative to our National Defense Strategy and the security our homeland. I look forward to meeting with you to discuss your plan. Thank you for your consideration and continued service to our country.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Angus King". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Angus S. King, Jr.  
United States Senator