

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 17, 2017

The Honorable Chris Christie
Governor
State of New Jersey
PO Box 001
Trenton, NJ 08625

Dear Governor Christie:

We write today to submit to you recommendations that we gathered from community leaders from across Connecticut at a recent Opioid Summit. As you know, the opioid epidemic is devastating communities across the nation and more must be done to combat this crisis. We urge you to use these comments as you develop the interim and final reports for President Trump.

The Opioid Summit we convened brought together local residents, law enforcement, first responders, treatment providers, and community organizations. Participants heard Dr. James Gill, Connecticut's Chief Medical Examiner, give a sobering presentation about the state of this crisis in Connecticut. Dr. Gill said that opioids were present in 93 percent of the 917 people who died in 2016 from a drug overdose. The powerful drug fentanyl was involved in the deaths of 483 people – a staggering 544 percent increase since just a couple of years ago. In 2016, more people in Connecticut died from drug overdoses than from homicides, suicides, and car accidents combined. Following Dr. Gill's presentation, attendees broke into small groups to develop the enclosed recommendations. Your colleague in this effort, Dr. Bertha Madras, closed the Summit with some thoughtful insights on the opioid crisis.

As the administration's opioid task force continues its work, we want to emphasize and echo comments that you heard during your inaugural meeting in June regarding the role of Medicaid, the federal mental health parity law, and the federal Essential Health Benefits standard. Medicaid is the largest payer for addiction and mental health treatment, and any legislation that cuts billions from it will hurt our efforts to combat this epidemic. Likewise, the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008 and the private insurance coverage gains from the Affordable Care Act (ACA) have helped millions of Americans get the care they need. Two experts recently estimated that 2.8 million Americans with a substance use disorder, including about 220,000 with an opioid disorder, would lose some or all of their insurance coverage if the ACA were repealed. We, like most Americans, are opposed to this approach and urge the Trump administration to build on the work of the ACA by making treatment more available to Americans in need.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of these recommendations.

Sincerely,



Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

cc: Charlie Baker, Governor of Massachusetts
Roy Cooper, Governor of North Carolina
Patrick Kennedy
Bertha Madras, PhD