

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 2, 2017

President Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

I write today in response to the remarks you made Tuesday night to the Joint Session of Congress with regard to substance misuse disorders. I agree with you on the importance of combatting the opioid epidemic which, as you know, has taken a devastating toll on thousands of New Hampshire families. During your many visits to New Hampshire last year and in your remarks Tuesday night, you promised these families that your Administration would expand treatment and end this crisis. I believe that to achieve that goal, we must ensure the strength of all federal programs that combat the opioid epidemic, and I remain concerned that many of the policies your Administration has outlined would significantly undermine our ability to effectively address this crisis.

As Ranking Member of the Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee, I will continue my support for critical programs that assist the first responders and treatment providers on the ground in this effort. For example, the Community Oriented Policing Services Anti-Heroin Task Force grant program is a vital tool for law enforcement officials to get these drugs off our streets. The Prescription Drug Monitoring Program helps prevent and reduce the misuse of prescribed medication including opioids. Funding for Drug Courts and the Second Chance Act help to ensure that patients receive the treatment they need. These programs directly benefit my state and the rest of the country as they respond to this public health crisis. In light of the value of these programs, I am concerned that the across-the-board cuts to domestic discretionary spending that your Administration plans to propose would jeopardize programs that are already serving families affected by the opioid epidemic in New Hampshire and across the country.

Last Congress, we saw progress in addressing this problem with the enactment of the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (CARA) and the subsequent 21st Century Cures Act. Many on both sides of the aisle heralded the contribution these laws would make to reduce the opioid crisis in our country. Without funding for the programs in these new laws, however, these authorizations will be merely lip service. Furthermore, as part of the implementation of these programs within the jurisdiction of the Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies Subcommittee, as well as under the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) within the Department of Health and Human Services, we must prioritize funding grants for communities based on their actual need and the scope of their problem to ensure that we are targeting resources wisely.

We have seen firsthand in New Hampshire that coordination and collaboration on the federal, state and local level is a vital part of addressing this national crisis. As a result, I am troubled by reports that offices such as the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) may be eliminated under your Administration's budget proposal. Now is not the time to cut back on any efforts to further these important policy discussions.

Most importantly, any efforts made by your Administration to repeal the Affordable Care Act (ACA) will undeniably hurt those who are currently receiving treatment for substance misuse disorders and hinder those who may be considering treatment. It is unconscionable to disrupt the delivery of critical health care services for individuals suffering from this public health emergency. No matter how much we strengthen programs in other agencies to combat this crisis, we will lose precious ground in the battle against opioid misuse if the ACA is repealed.

Moreover, other efforts to cut Medicaid, including repealing the ACA's expansion or reducing funding to states under the guise of "increased flexibility", threaten the health of individuals struggling with substance misuse and the providers and local governments trying to help them. As a former Governor, I know firsthand how critical the Medicaid program is to state and local economies in addition to providers and the patients they serve. The Medicaid program is a vital tool in our effort to defeat this epidemic.

I urge you to keep these considerations in mind as your Administration follows through on your promise to expand treatment and end the national opioid crisis, and I remain committed to working across the aisle to find effective solutions for the millions of people suffering in New Hampshire and throughout the country.

Sincerely,


Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator

CC:

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