

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 18, 2019

The Honorable Richard Shelby  
Chairman  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy  
Vice Chairman  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and  
Human Services, Education and  
Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and  
Human Services, Education and  
Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Shelby, Vice Chairman Leahy, Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

As you work to chart a path forward for Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies (“LHHS”) appropriations for Fiscal Year (FY) 2020, I write to urge you to provide the resources and flexibility that states need in addressing the substance use disorder epidemic. By building on the important investments that Congress has made in the past two years for substance use disorder treatment and prevention and supplementing those investments this year with additional flexibility for how states can use the dollars, we can help provide the foundation that our communities need in their efforts to turn the tide on this crisis.

Specifically, I strongly encourage the Committee to ensure that the following policies and funding levels are provided in FY 2020 LHHS appropriations:

1. At a minimum, Congress should continue to provide \$1.5 billion in funding for the State Opioid Response (SOR) grant program.
2. Congress must continue to reserve at least 15 percent of SOR grant funding for states that have the highest rates of opioid overdose deaths per capita.
3. Congress should provide flexibility for states, so that SOR grant dollars can be used for prevention and treatment related to the misuse of cocaine, methamphetamines and other substances, in addition to prevention and treatment of opioid use disorder.

For FY 2018, Congress provided \$1 billion in SOR grant funding to help supplement the \$500 million in state opioid grants that were already set to be provided under the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Cures Act.

This funding brought the total investment in opioid grants for states to \$1.5 billion for FY 2018. Critically, thanks to our collaborative endeavors in the FY 2018 omnibus appropriations bill, Congress required that 15 percent of the \$1 billion in new SOR grant funding must be set aside for the hardest-hit states with the highest rates of opioid overdose deaths per capita. As a result, smaller states like New Hampshire—that are especially hard-hit by the substance use disorder epidemic—are no longer at a disadvantage in the funding formula for opioid use disorder prevention and treatment grants. Thanks to your partnership, in FY 2019, Congress maintained a \$1.5 billion total funding level for these grants by increasing SOR grant funding to \$1.5 billion to account for the expiration of the \$500 million in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Cures Act grants in FY 2019. Congress required that 15 percent of the funds be set aside for the hardest-hit states and subjected all \$1.5 billion to the 15 percent set-aside. As a result of these changes, New Hampshire’s share of state grants for opioid use disorder prevention and treatment grew from \$3.1 million in FY 2017 to nearly \$35 million in FY 2019.

The SOR grant funding has been vital to New Hampshire’s ongoing effort to expand access to medication-assisted treatment (MAT) and recovery supports for Granite Staters who struggle with substance misuse. So far this year, New Hampshire’s treatment and recovery program that is funded by the grants has provided substance use disorder treatment referrals for more than 3,200 patients, conducted over 2,000 clinical evaluations and distributed naloxone kits to nearly 2,000 individuals. However, these are just the first steps in what must be a sustained effort. Last year, 471 Granite Staters died from drug overdoses, which is only a slight decrease from the 488 deaths confirmed in 2017. Addressing the scope of this crisis head-on requires ongoing funding commitments.

It will be equally important to improve flexibility to allow states to use SOR grant dollars to address a wider range of substance misuse. For the first eight months of 2019, the number of methamphetamine-related deaths in New Hampshire has nearly tripled compared to the first eight months of 2018. During the same time period, the number of cocaine-related deaths in New Hampshire more than doubled. Time and again I hear concerns from treatment providers, first responders and families who tell me that when Granite Staters seek help for misuse of cocaine, methamphetamines or other substances, the providers of treatment are unable to tap into SOR grant dollars to help facilitate treatment and recovery unless the person also has a diagnosis for opioid use disorder. In order to stay ahead of this evolving epidemic, we need to ensure that states can use SOR grant dollars to combat misuse of stimulants and other drugs, in addition to combatting opioid misuse.

Working together, we can help ensure that communities in New Hampshire and across the country have the resources needed to combat this crisis. I will look forward to continuing to work with you on this critical issue.

Sincerely,



Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator