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October 26, 2017

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States of America
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Trump,

I write in response to reports that you intend to declare the nationwide opioid crisis a public health emergency. While I am pleased to see that the administration has decided to engage with members of both parties who have been hard at work on the issue of the opioid crisis for years, I urge you to work with Congress to fully fund our response.

In my state and throughout the country, opioids are claiming American lives at alarming rates. Connecticut's Office of the Chief Medical Examiner projects that 2017 will be the first year in history with more than 1,000 deaths statewide due to drug overdoses. Nationwide, the opioid and heroin crisis kills more Americans every three weeks than the tragic attacks of September 11, 2001. These are real people with real stories, and more of them will die if we fail to prioritize treatment.

I was encouraged by recent reports suggesting that you intend to declare this crisis an emergency; however, such a declaration must be coupled with real leadership and a commitment of resources to ensure that it is not hollow. Too many vital administration posts responsible for coordinating and directing the federal response to the opioid crisis remain unfilled, including the heads of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and the Office of National Drug Control Policy. Moreover, funding for the federal government to declare a public health emergency is dangerously low – less than $60,000 in available funds, according to an HHS spokesperson. That is clearly grossly inadequate to help save American lives.

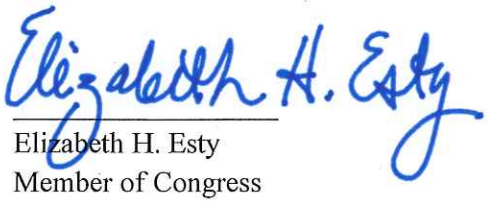
Our response to the opioid epidemic should include insurance coverage that provides the mental health and substance addiction treatment necessary to help those seeking assistance. It must also focus on the approach taken in the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (CARA) by providing educational resources for medical practitioners to prevent improper prescriptions and overdose deaths. These kinds of

common sense measures, implemented by qualified leaders at the head of HHS, DEA, and DHS, will save lives.

We have an opportunity to work together and show Americans that we are serious about treating the millions who are struggling with opioid addiction. However, our response must be one designed to meet the needs of families first. If we fail to commit the time, trained staff, and funds to resolve this crisis, we will fail those who desperately need our help.

I am prepared to work with you, as well as my Democratic and Republican colleagues, to ensure that our commitment to end the opioid epidemic in America is real and successful. I urge you to join with us to protect Americans.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth H. Esty
Member of Congress