United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 10, 2014

The Honorable Eric Holder, Jr.
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20530-2000

Dear Attorney General Holder:

Addiction to prescription opioids and heroin has become one of our nation's most challenging public health issues, affecting our neighborhoods and communities in ways far worse than anyone might have imagined. To confront this epidemic head on, we write to urge the Department of Justice (DOJ) to draw on the many evidenced-based strategies that are being successfully employed in the states. To truly break the cycle of drugs and crime, a collective response at the local, state and federal levels is required.

Prescription opioid and heroin addiction are both expressions of the same disease that drives a wide range of criminal activities and public health consequences. As such, we must treat addiction with approaches that leverage the best criminal justice and public health practices currently available. A comprehensive approach to the twin epidemics of opioid and heroin addiction should include: a) prevention and education, b) law enforcement, c) overdose prevention, and d) addiction treatment.

First, prevention and education efforts are essential to combating opioid and heroin addiction. We applaud DOJ programs such as the National Prescription Drug Take-Back Day, which provides a safe way to dispose of unwanted prescription drugs and helps educate the public about the potential for abuse of widely available medications. We see value in expanding this approach to one where disposal sites are much more available. We encourage you to work with other federal agencies, such as the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Education, as well as state and local partners to build on programs that help prevent abuse.

Second, many opioid addicted individuals do not take steps to address their disease until after they have landed in the criminal justice system. Through drug courts, effective re-entry and diversion programs, individuals addicted to heroin and other opioids are guided towards recovery, provided with evidence-based treatments for their addiction, and overseen with case management and monitoring to ensure that they comply with those treatments for an appropriate period of time. These are hybrid approaches that fully integrate criminal justice with public health.

Third, overdose prevention efforts are critically important because lives can be saved with access to overdose rescue medications such as naloxone. Expanded use of this short-acting opioid blocking medication is an intervention that should be available to all emergency responders and health providers.

Finally, an extensive body of research exists that support the use of medications for the treatment of opioid addiction, when used in combination with counseling. To confront this budgetary and public health crisis, DOJ must build upon the innovative work being done in the states. Specifically, the Department should initiate a multi-state program utilizing anti-addiction medications to support successful reentry into society of opioid addicted offenders from various corrections settings.

To effectively address the problem of heroin and opioid dependence in our country, an "all hands on deck" approach that recognizes the value of prevention and education, law enforcement, overdose prevention and the utilization of all opioid addiction treatments is required.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

ROB PORTMAN
United States Senator

TOM UDALL
United States Senator

ROY BLUNT
United States Senator

DIANNE FEINSTEIN
United States Senator

KELLY AYOTTE
United States Senator

SHELDON WHITEHOUSE
United States Senator

PAT ROBERTS
United States Senator

SHERROD BROWN
United States Senator

CHUCK SCHUMER
United States Senator

SUSAN COLLINS
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ELIZABETH WARREN
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PATRICK LEAHY
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