United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 29, 2016

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, HHS and Education
Room S-128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Labor, HHS and Education
Room S-128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

As you know, the problem of heroin and opioid abuse continues to grow at alarming rates throughout the nation. We continue to see the devastating effects of heroin and opioid abuse on public health and safety across the United States. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), drug overdoses now surpass automobile accidents as the leading cause of injury-related death for Americans ages 25 to 64. Every day, more than 120 Americans die as a result of drug overdose. Over half of these drug overdoses are related to prescription drugs. While addiction is a treatable disease, only about ten percent of those who need treatment receive it.

As the author of the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (CARA), I request that the FY 2017 appropriations legislation fully fund the programs and initiatives in this critical bill. CARA authorizes the resources and incentives necessary for states and local governments to expand treatment, prevention, and recovery efforts for the millions of Americans who are affected by substance use disorders. CARA has the support of national stakeholders in the public health, law enforcement, criminal justice, and drug policy fields. It is designed to fight prescription opioid abuse and heroin use holistically – from expanding prevention to supporting recovery.

If fully funded, CARA will help states and communities develop and implement evidence-based programs to respond to this epidemic. CARA expands prevention and educational efforts to prevent prescription opioid abuse and the use of heroin and increases drug disposal sites to keep medications out of the hands of youth. CARA authorizes law enforcement task-forces to combat heroin and methamphetamine and expands the availability of the overdose reversal drug naloxone to law enforcement agencies and first responders. In the criminal justice system, CARA will help to promptly identify and treat individuals suffering from substance use disorders and expand diversion and education efforts to give individuals a second chance.

CARA authorizes resources to expand treatment, including Medication Assisted Treatment. CARA allows veterans who were discharged for a substance abuse disorder to use drug courts as they recover. This legislation also expands drug treatment for pregnant women who struggle with addiction and provides support for babies born with neonatal abstinence syndrome.

CARA supports recovery programs including those focused on youth and building communities of recovery. It also creates a national task force on recovery to improve ways to address the collateral consequences imposed by addiction.

It is only through a comprehensive approach that we can leverage evidence-based law enforcement and health care services, including treatment, to stop and reverse current trends. I urge you to fully fund this bipartisan legislation which includes prevention, law enforcement strategies, efforts to prevent overdose deaths, expansion of evidence-based treatment, and support for those in, or seeking, recovery.

Thank you for your consideration of my request. I look forward to working with you as the FY 2017 appropriations process moves forward.

Sincerely,

Rob Portman
United States Senator