

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 20, 2015

The Honorable Loretta Lynch  
Attorney General  
United States Department of Justice  
Washington, D.C. 20530

Dear Attorney General Lynch:

We write to emphasize the importance and usefulness of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) National Prescription Drug Take-Back Program. While we are pleased that the DEA has recently issued regulations that would legally expand the options for disposal of controlled substances, we are disappointed that DEA has simultaneously decided to cease this opportunity for public service by announcing that it no longer intends to sponsor National Prescription Drug Take-Back Days. In light of the yet to be seen widespread adoption of alternative and easy to use disposal options for consumers, we urge you to reinstate this program given the vitally important role it plays in reducing the excess supply of prescription drugs.

According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), health care providers wrote 259 million prescriptions for opioid painkillers in 2012, the most recent year with data available, amounting to enough for every American adult to have their own bottle of painkillers.<sup>1</sup> When unused prescription medications accumulate at home it creates a public health and safety concern, because these pills can be accidentally ingested, stolen, misused, and abused. It is estimated that 69 percent of people who abused prescription painkillers obtained these drugs from a family member or friend.<sup>2</sup>

The risks of painkiller abuse are incredibly devastating. Approximately 44 people die every day in this country as a result of prescription opioid overdose and more than 30 people are admitted to an emergency room because of opioid complications.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, some individuals who become addicted to prescription opioid painkillers may be driven to use illicit substances such as heroin, which have similar neurological effects. Data by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration indicates that four out of five heroin users started abusing prescription drugs first.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, death from heroin overdose in the U.S. has almost tripled between 2010 and 2013.<sup>5</sup>

To address the crisis of prescription drug abuse and overdoses related to this abuse it is imperative that a secure, convenient way to dispose of unused, unneeded, or expired medications exists. Drug take-back days have proven to be an incredibly successful means for reducing the supply of prescription drugs in the home. At the last DEA sponsored National Prescription Drug

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<sup>1</sup> CDC Vital Signs: opioid Painkiller Prescribing: Where you live makes a difference, July 2014

<sup>2</sup> SAMHSA, Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality: Results from the 2012 National Survey on Drug Use and Health

<sup>3</sup> CDC Vital Signs: opioid Painkiller Prescribing: Where you live makes a difference, July 2014 and CDC Injury Prevention and Control: Prescription Drug Overdose See: <http://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/data/overdose.html>

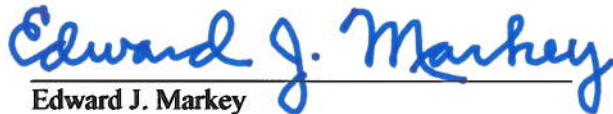
<sup>4</sup> Muhuri, P., Gfroerer, J. and Davies, C. Association of Nonmedical Pain Reliever Use and Initiation of Heroin Use in the United States. SAMHSA, Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality Data Review, August 2013

<sup>5</sup> Hedegarrd, H., Chen, L and Warner, M., Drug-poisoning Deaths involving heroin: United States, 2000-2013. National Center for Health Statistics Data Brief, March 2015

Take-Back event in 2014, the DEA and more than 4,000 of its partners collected 309 tons of unwanted drugs at nearly 5,500 individual sites, bringing the total amount of drugs collected in four years to more than 2,400 tons. The public's enormous response to each of DEA's National Take-Back Days demonstrates the need for an easy, well known, and convenient way to prevent pill abuse and theft by ridding homes of unwanted and potentially dangerous prescription drugs.

Ideally consumers would have routine, convenient and multiple legal options for disposing of unwanted and unused prescriptions and we support all efforts in increasing and improving the options for legal disposal. Furthermore, we encourage DEA to continue engaging with local law enforcement, private industry and others about implementing prescription drug take-back options that comply with DEA's new regulations. It is evident that the promotion and support of DEA in sponsoring National Prescription Drug Take-Back Days have been incredibly important piece of the puzzle in addressing the opioid overdose epidemic and we urge DEA to reconsider its cessation of this public outreach program and reinstitute National Prescription Drug Take-Back Days.

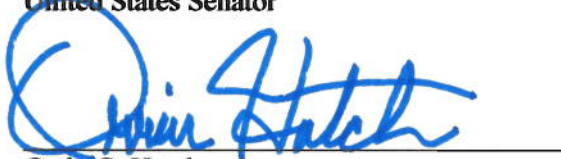
Sincerely,



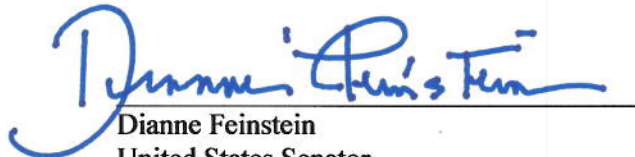
Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator



Charles E. Schumer  
United States Senator



Orrin G. Hatch  
United States Senator



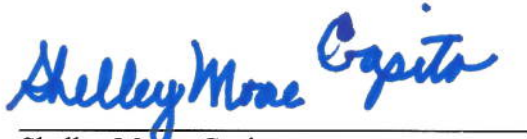
Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator



Charles E. Grassley  
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator



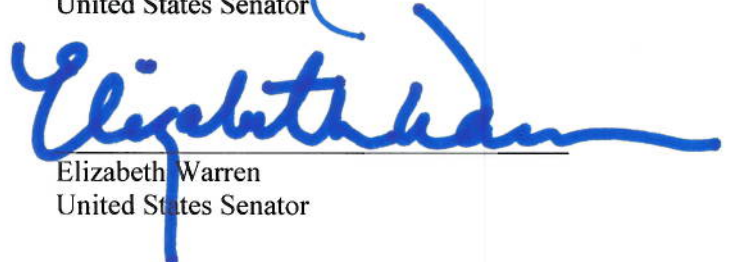
Shelley Moore Capito  
United States Senator



Joe Manchin, III  
United States Senator



Kelly A. Ayotte  
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator

cc: Chuck Rosenberg, Acting Administrator, Drug Enforcement Administration