

THE NEW ENGLAND COUNCIL

October 5, 2015

The Honorable Richard Blumenthal
U.S. Senate
706 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Legislative Efforts to Combat the Opioid Addiction Crisis

Dear Senator Blumenthal,

The New England Council, the nation's oldest regional business association, shares the concerns of our leaders in Congress about the opioid abuse crisis plaguing our nation and we appreciate the many legislative efforts to address this devastating problem. The Office of National Drug Control Policy has indicated that drug treatment facilities are seeing record numbers of admission for heroin and other opioid addictions. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, drug overdoses now surpass automobile accidents as the leading cause of injury-related death for Americans between the ages of 25 and 64, with 120 Americans dying as the result of overdose each day. The New England region has experienced particularly high levels of opioid abuse in recent years. As you may know, New England was one of five "High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas" recently selected by the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy for federal support under its Heroin Response Strategy.

Opioid abuse is not just a public health problem, but an economic problem. In the United States, prescription opioid abuse costs were about \$55.7 billion in 2007. Of this amount, 46 percent was attributable to work-place costs (e.g., lost productivity), 45 percent to healthcare costs (e.g., abuse treatment), and 9 percent to criminal justice costs. In 2011, opioid abuse cost health insurers an estimated \$72 billion annually in medical costs. And of course, for employers of all types and sizes, healthy, productive employees represent their greatest asset and are critical to continued growth.

Tackling this crisis requires a comprehensive, multi-pronged approach that includes education, prevention, treatment, recovery support, and law enforcement resources. To that end, The New England Council hopes that you will support four pieces of bipartisan, bicameral legislation that we believe will provide an effective and comprehensive response to the opioid abuse crisis.

1. Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act of 2015 (CARA) - S. 524

The Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act of 2015 is the most expansive federal legislation filed to date for addiction support services, designating between \$40 million and \$80 million toward advancing treatment and recovery support services in state and local communities across the country, which will help save the lives of countless people. The measure includes the expansion of community-based prevention efforts, treatment alternatives to incarceration, naloxone distribution to reduce opioid overdose deaths, high school and collegiate recovery support programs, community- and peer-based recovery support services, expanded treatment and recovery support services for women and veterans, and removal of discriminatory obstacles for people seeking recovery. Additionally, it extends supports initiated through the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment's Recovery Community Services Program and Access to Recovery Program and complements the

The New England Council

98 North Washington Street, Suite 201 • Boston, Massachusetts 02114 • (617) 723-4009
331 Constitution Avenue, NE • Washington, DC 20002 • (202) 547-0048
www.newenglandcouncil.com

expansion of treatment access unfolding through the Affordable Care Act and the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Acts.

2. Heroin and Prescription Opioid Abuse Prevention, Education, and Enforcement Act of 2015 - S. 1134

The Heroin and Prescription Opioid Abuse Prevention, Education, and Enforcement Act creates an Inter-Agency Task Force on Prescribing Practices to develop best practices in pain medication prescribing and related pain management and strategies for disseminating information about the guidelines to prescribers, pharmacists, and State Medical Boards. It also authorizes state grant programs to provide funding for enhancing Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs and supporting law enforcement, prevention and education, drug treatment, technology improvement, criminal victim and witness programs. And it establish a Naloxone Demonstration Grant program to fund technical support and program implementation for entities to train emergency medical service staff in administering approved opioid overdose reversal drugs.

3. National All Schedules Prescription Electronic Reporting (NASPER) Reauthorization Act of 2015 - S. 480

The NASPER Reauthorization Act of 2015 would reauthorize the NASPER program to support state prescription drug monitoring programs in order to ensure that appropriate law enforcement, regulatory, and state professional licensing authorities have access to prescription history information for the purposes of investigating drug diversion and prescribing and dispensing practices of errant prescribers or pharmacists. The bill also would authorize the Drug Enforcement Administration or a state Medicaid program or state health department receiving non-identifiable information from a controlled substance monitoring database to make such information available to other entities for research purposes.

4. Recovery Enhancement for Addiction Treatment (TREAT) Act - S.1455

The Recovery Enhancement for Addiction Treatment Act would expand the ability of addiction medical specialists and other trained medical professionals to provide life-saving medication-assisted therapies such as buprenorphine (also called Suboxone) for patients battling heroin and prescription drug addiction. It increases the number of patients a provider and other trained specialists are initially allowed to treat from 30 patients to 100 patients per year, and allows physicians, after one year, to request removal of the limit on patients if the physician is a certified substance abuse treatment specialist. Under the bill, physicians are required to fully participate in state-based prescription drug monitoring databases to track prescription drug use. The bill would also allow trained nurse practitioners and physician assistants to treat, for the first time, opioid dependent patients with approved medication assisted treatments.

We believe that these bills provide a significant federal response to the individuals, families, and communities injured by opioid addiction by allowing our states, cities and towns to acquire the tools needed to effectively combat the opioid abuse crisis, both here in New England and nationwide, and we hope that you will consider supporting them. If you have any questions or would like additional information, please feel free to contact me at ehesig@newenglandcouncil.com or (617) 365-2647.

Sincerely,



Emily J. Heisig
Senior Vice President, Communications & Federal Affairs

The New England Council

98 North Washington Street, Suite 201 • Boston, Massachusetts 02114 • (617) 723-4009
331 Constitution Avenue, NE • Washington, DC 20002 • (202) 547-0048
www.newenglandcouncil.com