

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4804

ENERGY AND NATURAL  
RESOURCES COMMITTEE  
ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE  
COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND  
TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE  
VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

December 18, 2017

The Honorable Bill J. Crouch  
Secretary  
Department of Health and Human Resources  
One Davis Square, Suite 100 East  
Charleston, West Virginia 25301

Dear Secretary Crouch:

As you know, we lost more than 33,000 Americans to opioid overdoses in 2015 alone<sup>1</sup> and early estimates indicate that that number was even higher in 2016.<sup>2</sup> Our state of West Virginia has been the hardest hit state in the country: in 2016, we lost more than 700 West Virginians to an opioid overdose. This epidemic has devastated our communities and torn families apart. That is why it is so important that we all work together to take steps to end this crisis.

Given the deadly impact of this epidemic, I am pleased to see West Virginia moving forward to develop a response plan to combat the opioid epidemic. As a former Governor and current United States Senator of our great state, I wanted to share a few commonsense recommendations for the panel to consider. I have been on the frontlines of this battle for many years and some progress is being made, but now more than ever, we need to double down and fight to save the lives of our fellow West Virginians.

First, I urge you to use every authority that you have to empower regulators, including the West Virginia Board of Medicine and the Board of Pharmacy, to go after bad actors: those prescribers, pharmacies, distributors, and pharmaceutical companies that are contributing to the flood of opioid pills in West Virginia's communities. These individuals and companies are doing incredible harm to our state and should not be allowed to continue to practice. I have been working at the federal level to ensure that the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and other federal agencies have the authorities that they need to stop irresponsible opioid prescribing and distribution, but we all must work together at every level of government to end the flow of unnecessary opioids coming to our state.

Second, I urge you to adopt mandatory prescriber education about the dangers of opioids and the risks of addiction and overdose deaths. Too many well-meaning medical professionals have had insufficient training on opioids, including effective pain management alternatives and the risks of substance use disorders. I have introduced a bill in the Senate that would require prescribers in every state to receive 3 hours of training to qualify for a DEA license, and I have pushed the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/data/statedeaths.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/06/05/upshot/opioid-epidemic-drug-overdose-deaths-are-rising-faster-than-ever.html>

Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to require prescriber training for opioid prescribers, but West Virginia can take that step now and lead the way for the rest of the country to follow.

Finally, I urge the Governor and the State Legislature to issue a State of Emergency declaration. While West Virginia is not the only state impacted by the opioid crisis, we have been hit particularly hard and lead the nation in the number of people dying each year from an overdose. This declaration would provide the state additional flexibility in accessing the resources needed to address this crisis. Several states have already issued a State of Emergency declaration, including our neighbors in Maryland and Virginia.<sup>3</sup> This has enabled them to tap into previously unavailable funding, increase access to the overdose-reserving drug naloxone, and get more people into treatment. We need to make sure that every available resource is being utilized to its maximum value.

I am committed to doing everything that I can to address this crisis and look forward to working with you and sharing additional ideas for steps that we must take – at the local, state, and federal levels – to rebuild our communities and save lives. Only working together can we stop this deadly epidemic.

Again, thank you for the work that you are doing to raise awareness and to promote commonsense solutions to address stop the opioid crisis. Too many people in our communities are losing their lives, families, and futures to opioids and we must do everything in our power to help them. I look forward to continuing to work with you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Joe Manchin III", written over a horizontal line. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Joe Manchin III  
United States Senator

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2017/08/11/542836709/from-alaska-to-florida-states-respond-to-opioid-crisis-with-emergency-declaratio>