

MANCHIN URGES SECRETARY AZAR TO GIVE HIGH MORTALITY RATE STATES LIKE WEST VIRGINIA THE MOST FUNDING

U.S. Senator Joe Manchin (D-WV) urged U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Alex Azar to review the State Opioid Response Grant program formula, to place a greater emphasis on sending funding to states with high mortality rates like West Virginia. He also urged him to direct as much funding as possible to small, hard-hit states like West Virginia that have been failed by previous grant programs.

Senator Manchin said in part: "Our state also faces the largest per-capita economic burden in the country: the opioid epidemic is costing our economy an estimated \$8.8 billion per year, forcing us to dedicate the largest share of our GDP of any state to costs related to the crisis: 12%. This is a staggering cost for a small state like ours. These statistics help tell the story of the human toll that this epidemic is taking on my state and highlight the need for federal funding to be targeted to states like West Virginia that are on the front lines. That is why I urge you, as you review the State Opioid Response Grant program formula, to place a greater emphasis on sending funding to states with high mortality rates."

In the FY18 spending bill, Senator Manchin successfully pushed for the inclusion of \$3.3 billion in new funding to address the opioid crisis and improve access to mental health care. This includes \$2.8 billion for HHS to improve access to treatment, prevention and research for programs. \$1 billion of this funding will go directly to the states through the State Opioid Response Grant program, which includes a 15% set aside for states with high mortality rates like West Virginia that Senator Manchin fought to ensure was included in the bill. For a full list of funding to fight the opioid epidemic and other West Virginia priorities click here.

Read the full letter below:
Dear Secretary Azar,
There is no single issue that is causing greater harm to the

people of West Virginia than the opioid epidemic. This crisis impacts virtually every person in my state. It hits us in the lives we lose, in the families and communities that are torn apart, and in the economic costs that we bear. That is why, as the senior Senator from West Virginia, I have been fighting every day to address this epidemic and help my state get the resources that we need to bring it to an end.

It is why I fought so hard to ensure that the FY18 omnibus spending bill included an additional \$3.3 billion in new funding to address the opioid crisis and improve access to mental health care. This includes \$2.8 billion for the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to improve access to treatment, prevention and research. \$1 billion of this funding will go directly to the states through the State Opioid Response Grant program. While I have always supported this grant program, I have raised concerns from the beginning that the formula that HHS originally created did not adequately take into account the devastating impact of this crisis in states with high mortality rates like West Virginia. That is why I pushed for and was pleased to see that the omnibus included a 15% set aside within the state grant for high mortality states. I also pushed for and was encouraged to see language requiring HHS to review the formula and ensure that it takes into account the most relevant and reliable measures of drug use and drug-related deaths.

We need real resources to combat this epidemic, and those resources must be targeted to the states, like West Virginia, with the highest per capita opioid overdose death rates. According to the CDC, West Virginia has by far the highest drug overdose death rate in the nation. In 2016, we lost 52 people per 100,000 people to a drug overdose. That's compared to the national average a rate of 19.8 people per 100,000 pop-

ulation.

Our state also faces the largest per-capita economic burden in the country: the opioid epidemic is costing our economy an estimated \$8.8 billion per year, forcing us to dedicate the largest share of our GDP of any state to costs related to the crisis: 12%. This is a staggering cost for a small state like ours.

These statistics help tell the story of the human toll that this epidemic is taking on my state and highlight the need for federal funding to be targeted to states like West Virginia that are on the front lines. That is why I urge you, as you review the State Opioid Response Grant program formula, to place a greater emphasis on sending funding to states with high mortality rates.

Similarly, I ask that as you consider how to distribute the remaining federal funds dedicated to stopping the opioid epidemic, you direct as much funding as possible to small, hard-hit states like West Virginia that have been failed by previous grant programs. While I supported the \$500 million distributed in the first round of CURES, the just under \$6 million that trickled down to West Virginia is nowhere near enough. In the FY18 omnibus, the Congressional intent is clear – more of this funding should go to places like West Virginia. West Virginia is at the center of this crisis and we need your help. I stand ready to work with you and the President and will do everything in my power to ensure that West Virginia has the funding that it needs to adequately respond to this crisis and save our communities. I look forward to continuing to work with you to end the opioid epidemic.



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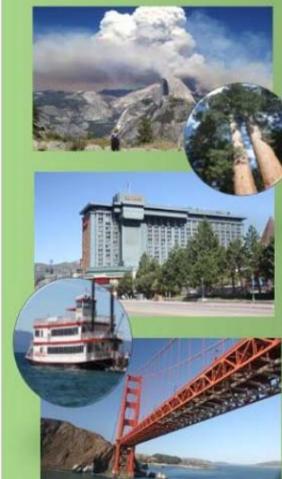


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