



November 30, 2021

Speaker Nancy Pelosi
1236 Longworth H.O.B.
Washington, DC 20515

Senate Majority Leader Charles Schumer
322 Hart S.O.B.
Washington, DC 20510

House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer
H-107, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell
317 Russell S.O.B.
Washington, DC 20510

House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy
2468 Rayburn H.O.B.
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Immediately Pass Legislation to Reduce Record Number of Overdose Deaths

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader Schumer, Majority Leader Hoyer, Minority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader McCarthy, and Honorable Members of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives:

The Drug Policy Alliance, National Harm Reduction Coalition, People’s Action, and VOCAL-NY, along with the undersigned 240 drug policy, health policy, criminal justice, civil rights and advocacy organizations, urge Congress to swiftly enact legislation to address the historic and ongoing drug overdose epidemic by supporting urgently-needed public health services, including increased access to harm reduction services and treatment. This year the U.S. reached the grim, but not unexpected, marker of over 100,000 overdose deaths. People nationwide died from never-before-seen numbers of preventable drug overdoses between April 2020 and April 2021, according to provisional data recently published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).¹ ***This represents the highest number of overdose deaths ever on record.***

For the past 50 years, the U.S. has carried out an enforcement-first, criminalization approach to drug policy. Criminalization has not reduced the illicit drug supply nor has it

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Provisional Drug Overdose Death Counts,” Nov. 17, 2021, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm>.

saved lives, as evidenced by the increasing number of overdose deaths. Instead, criminalization has perpetuated stigma against people who use drugs, creating an environment where individuals have a more difficult time accessing the health services and support they need. These approaches have also fueled overdose numbers by pushing people into risky situations, making the drug supply unregulated and unsafe, and wasting resources on punishment instead of harm reduction and other health services proven to save lives.

Criminalization of drug activity has also made the U.S. the greatest incarcerator in the world. The effects of criminalization extend beyond horrendous jail and prison sentences that tear apart families, but a criminal record negatively impacts a person's ability to obtain housing, employment, and education, among other collateral consequences. Ironically, the loss of these opportunities can exacerbate drug use. Notably, criminalization falls disproportionately on the shoulders of communities of color, which also face unique obstacles in accessing health services.

In the midst of the deadliest overdose crisis our country has ever seen, Congress must take immediate action now. We cannot wait for more of our family members, friends, and community members to die before we take critical action. While we commend Congress for passing the American Rescue Plan earlier this year, which provided an unprecedented \$30 million in federal funding for harm reduction services such as syringe service programs and naloxone distribution, **this is not enough**. It is imperative that Congress build upon this effort to more effectively respond to this state of emergency.

We urge Congress to enact the following legislation before the end of the 2022 calendar year, including:

- **\$69.5 million in FY22 funding** (the House-passed level) to increase access to overdose prevention, harm reduction, and syringe service programs through the CDC's Infectious Diseases and the Opioid Epidemic program. Congress must finally appropriate this funding before December 31, 2021 and not delay these urgently needed and life-saving resources.
- **The Mainstreaming Addiction Treatment (MAT) Act (H.R. 1384/ S. 445)**, which eliminates the redundant and outdated requirement that practitioners apply for a separate waiver through the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) to prescribe buprenorphine for treatment of substance use disorder.
- **The Support, Treatment, and Overdose Prevention (STOP) of Fentanyl Act (H.R. 2366/ S.1457)**, or the STOP Fentanyl Act, which improves surveillance and detection of fentanyl and enhances evidence-based public health approaches to opioid overdose and substance use disorders.

- **The Medicaid Reentry Act (H.R. 955/ S. 285)**, currently included in the Build Back Better reconciliation package, which would allow Medicaid to cover health services during the last 30 days of incarceration and create better linkages to community-based care during reentry. Such linkages, including overdose prevention and substance use disorder treatment, would reduce the high risk of deadly overdose upon reentry.

Moreover, we urge Congress to help ensure that the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) both strongly engages stakeholders in the harm reduction community, including directly impacted people, and takes action to ensure that harm reduction services are scaled up quickly to help to prevent needless additional overdose deaths. As Dr. Rahul Gupta is now in place as the ONDCP Director, there is no time to waste and ONDCP must quickly move forward to achieve its priorities, especially advancing racial equity and expanding harm reduction efforts.

The nation cannot wait another year to address the skyrocketing increase in overdose deaths. The time to implement evidence-based policies grounded in compassion is now.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these urgent issues. If you have questions or need additional information, please contact Maritza Perez, Director of the Office of National Affairs of the Drug Policy Alliance, at mperez@drugpolicy.org.

Sincerely,

National Organizations

A Better Life Brianna's Hope
ADAP Advocacy Association
African American Health Alliance
AIDS Action Baltimore
AIDS United
All Saints' Episcopal Church
Americans for Democratic Action (ADA)
Association of Nurses in AIDS Care
Black AIDS Institute
Broken No More
Caring Ambassadors Program
Center for Black Equity

Center for Disability Rights
Center for Popular Democracy
College & Community Fellowship
College of Psychiatric and Neurologic Pharmacists (CPNP)
Community Access National Network (CANN)
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd
Covid Clinic, Inc.
CURE (Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants)
DanceSafe
Dignity & Power NOW
Dream Corps JUSTICE
Drug Policy Alliance
Due Process Institute
End Substance Use Disorder
Equality Federation
Fair and Just Prosecution
Faith in Public Life
First Step Alliance
Healing Equity and Liberation (HEAL) Organization
Health in Justice Action Lab
Hepatitis C Mentor and Support Group, Inc. - HCMSG
Hepatitis Education Project
HIV Medicine Association
Hope Recovery Strategies, LLC
Housing Works
In the Public Interest
InterReligious Task Force on Central America (IRTF Cleveland)
Ironpac
Japanese American Citizens League
JustLeadershipUSA
Lake Research Partners
LatinoJustice PRLDEF
Law Enforcement Action Partnership
Michael Galipeau Consulting

Moms for All Paths to Recovery
NAACP
NASTAD
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Alliance for Medication Assisted Recovery
National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers
National Council of Churches USA
National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence
National Council on Independent Living
National Harm Reduction Coalition
National Health Care for the Homeless Council
National Pain Advocacy Center
National Setting of the United Church of Christ
National Sobering Collaborative
National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable (NVHR)
National Working Positive Coalition
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
NEU Health Solutions, Inc.
Opioid Crisis Response Fund
Opioid Data Lab
People's Action
PFLAG National
Prevention Access Campaign
R Street Institute
Revolve Impact
Sojourners
Stop Stigma Now
StoptheDrugWar.org
Students for Sensible Drug Policy
The AIDS Institute
The Center for Great Expectations
The Festival Center
The Levenson Foundation
The Sentencing Project

The Sidewalk Project
The Well Project
Transitions Clinic Network
Treatment Action Group
Treatment Communities of America
Truth Pharm Inc.
Tzedek Association
Vital Strategies
Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)

State/Local Organizations

A Betor Way (TN)
ACLU of Illinois, Peoria Chapter (IL)
A New PATH (Parents for Addiction Treatment & Healing) (CA)
Any Positive Change Inc. (CA)
Above and Beyond Family Recovery Center (IL)
Access Point of Georgia Inc. (GA)
Access Support Network (CA)
Addiction Connections Resource (MD)
Addiction Institute of Mind and Medicine - Harm Reduction Institute (CA)
AIDS Alabama (AL)
AIDS Alabama South (AL)
AIDS Foundation Chicago (IL)
Alliance for Positive Health (NY)
Allies for Health + Wellbeing (PA)
Amistad (ME)
Any Positive Change Inc. (CA)
APLA Health (CA)
Arkansas Community Organizations (AR)
Ashley Shukait Consulting, LLC (MI)
Asian American Drug Abuse Program, Inc., (CA)
Bakersfield AIDS Project (CA)
Being Alive – LA (CA)
Blue Mountain Heart to Heart (WA)

BOOMHealth (NY)
Broward for Progress (FL)
Building Rhyme Thru Recovery at Westminster (DC)
California Association of Alcohol and Drug Program Executives (CAADPE) (CA)
Callen-Lorde Community Health Center (NY)
Camden Coalition for Health Providers (NJ)
Capitol Ballroom Council (DC)
CARES of Southwest Michigan (MI)
Cascade AIDS Project (OR) (WA)
Center for Living and Learning (CA)
Central Illinois Friends (IL)
Clare | Matrix (CA)
Clary Strategies (CA)
Colorado Individuals and Organizations Responding to HIV AIDS (CO)
Community Education Group (WV)
Community Health Project Los Angeles (CA)
Community Outreach and Prevention Network (MI)
DAP Health (CA)
Duneys Defense (IL)
Elevyst (PA)
End Hep C SF (CA)
Evergreen Health (NY)
Face to Face (CA)
Family Service Association of Bucks County (PA)
Georgia AIDS Coalition (GA)
Georgia Overdose Prevention (GA)
GLIDE (CA)
GoodWorks: North AL Harm Reduction (AL)
Ground Game LA (CA)
Harm Reduction Action Center (CO)
Harm Reduction Coalition of San Diego (CA)
Harm Reduction Services (CA)
Hawaii Health & Harm Reduction Center (HI)
Hep Free Hawaii (HI)

HIPS (DC)
HIV Education and Prevention Project of Alameda County (HEPPAC) (CA)
HoJo Family Assistance Program (IL)
Homeless Health Care Los Angeles (CA)
Hope House of St. Croix Valley (MN)
Houston Harm Reduction Alliance (TX)
Humboldt Area Center for Harm Reduction (CA)
Idaho Harm Reduction Project (ID)
iHealth NYS (NY)
Inland Empire Harm Reduction (CA)
Indivisible Georgia Coalition (GA)
Indivisible Marin (CA)
Indivisible Northern Nevada (NV)
Indivisible: Narberth and Beyond (PA)
JOLT Foundation (IL)
JOLT Harm Reduction (IL)
Kentucky Harm Reduction Coalition (KY)
Latino Commission on AIDS (NY)
Live4Lali (IL)
Los Angeles LGBT Center (CA)
Maine Drug Policy Lab at Colby College (ME)
Maine People's Alliance (ME)
Mainers for Accountable leadership Action (ME)
Martindale Clinic (UT)
Material Aid and Advocacy Program (MA)
MCAVHN Care and Prevention Network (CA)
Medical Advocacy & Outreach (AL)
MEDPEARL LLC (MD)
Men & Women In Prison Ministries (IL)
Monmouth County CARE (NJ)
Monterey County Prescribe Safe Initiative (CA)
National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Maryland Chapter (MD)
New Jersey Citizen Action (NJ)
New Jersey Harm Reduction Coalition (NJ)

New Jersey Organizing Project (NJ)
NEXT Distro (CA)
NH Harm Reduction Coalition (NH)
Northern Valley Harm Reduction Coalition (CA)
O.D. Aid (TX)
Ohio Transformation Fund (OH)
Oklahoma Harm Reduction Alliance (OK)
One Voice Recovery, Inc. (CA) (UT)
PAIN (NY)
Peoria City/County Health Department (IL)
Portland People's Outreach Project (PPOP) (OR)
Prevention Point Pittsburgh (PA)
Prism Health North Texas (TX)
Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada (NV)
Progressive Maryland (MD)
Project Weber/RENEW (RI)
Quad Cities Harm Reduction (IA) (IL)
Rights & Democracy (NH) (VT)
River Valley Organizing / UnHarming Ohio (OH)
San Francisco AIDS Foundation (CA)
San Francisco Hepatitis C Task Force (CA)
Scioto Connect (OH)
Sea Change RCO (NJ)
Sierra Harm Reduction Coalition (CA)
SIR Addiction Services Consulting (NY)
Skyline-Access (PA)
SLO Bangers- Syringe Exchange and Overdose Prevention Program (CA)
Smoky Mountain Harm Reduction (NC)
Sonoran Prevention Works (AZ)
Southeast Florida Recovery Advocates (FL)
Southern Tier AIDS Program/Southern Tier Care Coordination (NY)
St. James Infirmary (CA)
Suncoast Harm Reduction Project (FL)
Tapestry Health (MA)
Tarzana Treatment Centers Inc. (CA)

TASC (Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities) (IL)
Texas Harm Reduction Alliance (TX)
Texas Overdose Naloxone Initiative "TONI" (TX)
The "DIRT"" Advocacy Movement (OH)
The Atlanta Harm Reduction Coalition (GA)
The Los Angeles Trust for Children's Health (CA)
The North Carolina AIDS Action Network (NC)
The People's Lobby (IL)
The Perfectly Flawed Foundation (IL)
The Porchlight Collective, SAP (IL)
The Puerto Rico Project (IL)
The Spahr Center (CA)
Thresholds (IL)
VICTA (RI)
Virginia Department of Health (VA)
Virginia Hepatitis Coalition (VA)
Vivent Health (CO) (MO) (TX) (WI)
VOCAL-NY (NY)
Voices of Hope, Inc. (MD)
West Oakland Punks with Lunch (CA)
West Virginia Hepatitis Academic Mentoring Partnership (WVHAMP) (WV)
Western North Carolina AIDS Project (NC)
WV Citizen Action (WV)
Xodus Recovery Community Center (NJ)