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JOSH SHAPIRO
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August 2, 2018

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Trump,

I write to you to express my frustration with the lack of action by your Administration on the heroin and opioid crisis. Pennsylvania has been hard hit by this epidemic: According to the Centers for Disease Control, our Commonwealth loses an average of 15 Pennsylvanians to accidental overdose every day, totaling more than 5,400 per year. Making matters worse, it has cost our Commonwealth \$53 billion in health care spending, addiction treatment, criminal justice, and lost productivity indirectly related to this crisis.

As I travel across our Commonwealth, I see the toll that this crisis is taking on our communities. This epidemic affects everyone, whether black or white, rich or poor, young or old, rural, suburban, or urban. In every community I visit, I meet mothers who have lost sons and husbands who have lost wives to addiction and overdose. This epidemic shows no signs of slowing down, and we must do everything we can to try to stop it.

Last week I was in Luzerne County, a community that lost 160 people to overdose last year alone. When you visit tonight, please know that the people of Luzerne County—and the entire Commonwealth of Pennsylvania—need your help. To properly address this crisis, we need meaningful action and resources from the federal government.

When you took office last January, you committed to taking on addiction and overdose. On March 27, 2017, you established the President's Commission on Combating Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis. Led by former New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, the Commission met over the subsequent months to create key recommendations for your Administration to implement. On October 26, 2017, you held a press conference announcing the declaration of a public health emergency on the opioid crisis. I commended you for this action as a step in the right direction for our country.

Shortly thereafter, on November 1, 2017, the Commission held its last meeting and issued its final report. The report made 56 specific recommendations which, if implemented, would greatly reduce the effects of the opioid crisis by increasing access to treatment, improving law enforcement responses, and addressing issues in prescribing. The Commission's report contained important recommendations, including:

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- Providing block grants to the states to reduce administrative burdens and funnel resources directly to the areas of highest need and programs of greatest impact;
- Developing model statutes, regulations, policies, and standards to govern opioid prescription practices;
- Increasing funding to enhance, strengthen, and link the system of prescription drug monitoring programs in the states;
- Strengthening data collection to enable real-time surveillance of the crisis;
- Providing federal and state law enforcement with better tools to combat drug traffickers;
- Removing barriers to treatment, such as reimbursement barriers under federal benefits programs, to enable more people to access treatment and encourage more treatment facilities to open or expand; and
- Increasing access to naloxone, the overdose-reversal drug.

Sadly, these recommendations have not been meaningfully acted upon. While the public health emergency has been renewed on three separate occasions (most recently on July 19, 2018 by Secretary of Human Services Alex Azar), there are still far too many outstanding items from the Commission's report.

Funding for a variety of initiatives is a key part of the solution. But, while you pledged to spend "the most money ever on the opioid crisis," not nearly enough new federal funding has been allocated. To compound this lack of resources, key federal positions either remain unfilled—including leadership for the Drug Enforcement Administration and the Office of National Drug Control Policy—or are staffed with individuals who are unqualified to address a public health epidemic.

In addition to a lack of action and funding directly tied to the heroin and opioid crisis, your Administration and members of Congress have repeatedly tried to undermine Americans' access to healthcare, which in turn undermines access to addiction treatment. The instability in our healthcare system created by these efforts puts necessary treatment out of reach for more people each and every day. I, along with a bipartisan group of Attorneys General, have repeatedly called for you to increase access to treatment, which you could do with the stroke of a pen by removing the IMD Exclusion for addiction treatment. To date, you have declined to do so—even though your Commission recommended this action.

We can all agree that it is unacceptable to lose tens of thousands of American lives every year to overdose. During your visit to Luzerne County, I hope that you take time to meet with some of the families who have been so deeply affected by addiction and overdose. They will show you that this is not a Republican issue or a Democratic issue; it is an American issue, and it is an issue that demands real leadership from our President.

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Mr. President, please complete the task that you started last October. Use your powers as the chief executive of the federal government to take meaningful steps to address the opioid crisis. We cannot win this fight without your unequivocal support in the form of real action and meaningful resources.

All the best,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Josh Shapiro", with a stylized flourish at the end.

JOSH SHAPIRO