

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 08, 2017

VIA ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION:

Richard Baum
Acting Director
Office of National Drug Control Policy
750 17th Street NW
Washington, DC 20006

RE: President's Commission on Combatting Opioid Abuse

Dear Acting Director Baum:

Thank you for your work on the interim report prepared by the President's Commission on Combatting Opioid Abuse. The interim report rightly concluded that our nation is in a crisis due to misuse of opioids. Americans consume more opioids than any other country in the world. Since 1999, the number of opioid prescriptions **and** opioid overdoses have quadrupled in the U.S.

Unfortunately, the interim report did not include any reference to prescription drug take back programs. We believe these programs may be an effective part of an all-of-the-above strategy to approaching the opioid epidemic.

Many people who are prescribed opioids for legitimate medical conditions are unsure of how to properly dispose of them. This has exacerbated the problem of diversion of controlled substances. In 2010, Congress responded by passing and then the President signing, the Secured and Responsible Drug Disposal Act. This legislation authorizes retail pharmacies and other authorized entities to collect unwanted controlled substances from the public for safe disposal. In September 2014, the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) finalized regulations establishing a voluntary program for entities to become authorized collectors of unused controlled drugs.

Since enactment of the law, studies are showing the effectiveness of well-run drug take back programs. Rutgers University performed a multi-year study on these programs and concluded “Drug take back campaigns can be an effective mechanism to decrease the availability of prescriptions drugs in communities.”¹ Another study found the North Carolina Operation Medicine Drop playing “an important role in preventing future overdose deaths in NC.”²

In March of 2016, we wrote to the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) requesting a report to Congress to examine the DEA regulations, participation in the program, and how to decrease barriers for these programs. We anticipate a draft report from GAO very soon. Additionally, October 28, 2017 is the next National Prescription Drug Take Back Day, created to increase public awareness of these programs.

We write today to urge the Commission to include an evaluation of prescription drug take back programs in the final report.

Sincerely,


Charles E. Grassley
U.S. Senator


Joni K. Ernst
U.S. Senator

Cc: U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services, the Honorable Tom Price
The White House

¹Health Education & Behavior 2017, Vol. 44(4) 590–597.

²N C Med J. 2016 Jan-Feb; 77(1):59-62.