

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 20, 2017

Senator Mitch McConnell  
United States Capitol Building, S-230  
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Charles E. Schumer  
United States Capitol Building, S-221  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader McConnell and Leader Schumer,

As you know our country is currently experiencing an opioid crisis. In our home states of Indiana and Alaska, the epidemic has been particularly devastating in underserved areas that lack adequate treatment providers. While we welcome President Trump's recent declaration of a public health emergency, there is more that Congress can do to help those struggling with opioid addiction.

Programs like the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) are specifically designed to encourage health professionals to work in medically underserved areas. The authorization for the NHSC, however, recently expired on September 30, 2017. In response to President Trump's public health emergency declaration, we strongly encourage you to move quickly to reauthorize this program, increase its funding, and expand eligible treatment facilities to include addiction treatment as outlined in our bill the *Strengthening the Addiction Treatment Workforce Act*.

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), 22 million Americans aged 12 or older have experienced a substance use disorder, such as opioid addiction. However, only 1 in 10 people receive addiction treatment services, in part due to a shortage in the addiction treatment workforce.

In order to address this challenge, we have introduced the bipartisan *Strengthening the Addiction Treatment Workforce Act*. This bill would help address the shortage of providers who treat people battling substance use disorders by making addiction treatment facilities eligible for the NHSC student loan repayment and forgiveness program. Qualifying facilities must be primarily engaged in serving individuals living with or in recovery from substance use disorders, and have a license, certification, or accreditation required by the state.

The facility must also provide, at a minimum, outpatient counseling, FDA-approved medication-assisted treatment, other evidence-based ambulatory services, or residential treatment services, and other evidence-based opioid addiction treatment and recovery services. Our bill would allow

addiction treatment facilities to attract and retain a well-trained workforce in medically underserved areas and expand the number of health care providers, including nurses, social workers, counselors, psychologists, and therapists, who care for people struggling with substance use disorders.

The President was right to declare the opioid epidemic a national public health emergency, but additional progress will require Congress to invest more in addiction treatment and recovery efforts, especially in rural and underserved areas. We look forward to working with you on these efforts.

Sincerely,



Joe Donnelly  
United States Senator



Lisa Murkowski  
United States Senator