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NATURAL RESOURCES

## Congress of the United States House of Representatives

February 26, 2016

Mr. Michael Botticelli  
Director  
Office of National Drug Control Policy  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. Botticelli:

In late 2015, President Obama announced that the Office of National Drug Control Policy will host community forums to focus on best practices and other initiatives to prevent and treat prescription drug abuse and heroin use. After the recent release of data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) revealing that overdose deaths associated with opioids increased significantly across the country in 2014, I believe it is more critical than ever to raise awareness about this epidemic.

As I am sure you are aware, more Americans die annually from drug overdoses than they do motor vehicle crashes every year. The new data released by the CDC for 2014 highlights this pointed increase in heroin-involved deaths and deaths caused by synthetic opioids, including prescription painkillers. From 2013 to 2014 alone, opioid-related deaths increased by 16 percent and data from 2014 shows heroin-related deaths increased by over 28 percent. The National Institute on Drug Abuse has also found that on average, 23 percent of people who use heroine become dependent on it. In 2013, there were 22,767 deaths related to prescription drug overdose, 16,235 (71.3%) of which involved opioid painkillers. Sadly, this problem is only progressing and something must be done. As part of the Office of National Drug Control Policy's efforts to raise awareness and stop the rampant opioid and heroin epidemic in America, I ask that you consider holding a community forum in the 18<sup>th</sup> Congressional District of Illinois.

In my district alone, law enforcement seized over 20 pounds of heroin and over 226 pounds of pharmaceutical and other opioid drugs in 2015. Law enforcement officials have expressed to me that heroin use in my district is astounding with 26 heroin overdose deaths and 70 non-fatal overdoses from August, 2015 to January, 2016 in Peoria County, Illinois.

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Additionally, NARCAN was provided 826 times in Peoria County and 218 times in Tazewell County, IL by emergency medical personnel. The entire state of Illinois, according to CDC data, had a statistically significant increase of drug overdose deaths of 8.3 percent between 2013 and 2014 with over 1,705 drug overdose deaths in Illinois in 2014 alone.

Within Illinois and my district, law enforcement officials and hospitals are working together to increase the reporting of heroin and other opioid overdose admissions data. The deployment of NARCAN has helped to prevent death from overdose; however, the larger epidemic of opioid and heroin addictions in Illinois continues to plague our citizens. The Illinois Department of Health is developing rules and procedures for collecting information on overdoses as part of the newly required Heroin Crisis Act (Public Act 99-0480). This state law requires hospitals to report all overdoses, fatal or otherwise, to the state within 48 hours of the patient's treatment. The law also requires coroners to identify and disclose the fatal drug.

I understand that my district in Central and West Central Illinois is not the only area of the United States suffering from opioid and heroin overdoses, however, I feel that a community forum in the 18<sup>th</sup> Congressional District would provide an imperative opportunity to work together and to learn from law enforcement, medical professionals, and other community leaders dealing with this problem first hand, and to develop useful policy ideas and needed awareness for this epidemic. I thank you for your consideration of hosting a community forum in the 18<sup>th</sup> Congressional District of Illinois. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to me or Mary Ellen Richardson in my office at 202-225-6201 or [Maryellen.Richardson@mail.house.gov](mailto:Maryellen.Richardson@mail.house.gov).

Sincerely,



Darin LaHood  
Member of Congress