

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

September 11, 2020

The Honorable Timothy J. Shea
Acting Administrator
Drug Enforcement Agency
700 Army Navy Drive
Arlington, VA 22202

Dear Administrator Shea,

America is facing one of its greatest challenges today in the COVID-19 pandemic. While the federal government is engaged in every effort to beat this virus, it is also critical that we not lose sight of the opioid epidemic which continues to ravage our nation. Unfortunately, the same tactics which help us to stop the spread of COVID-19 are creating circumstances which have made tackling the opioid epidemic significantly more difficult.

For the millions of Americans struggling with opioid addiction, COVID-19 has emerged as a roadblock to recovery. Access to both inpatient and outpatient treatment has been curtailed, making it more difficult for those who want help to access assistance. Many Americans have faced furloughs, unemployment, and extended isolation due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all factors which impact our mental health and which make resisting opioid use more challenging. The government mandated restrictions on gathering with family and friends has caused support systems to weaken when they are needed the most. And for those who do relapse, an overdose may be deadly without having family and friends nearby to prevent a greater tragedy.

In light of the challenges those with an opioid addiction face, the federal government must remain vigilant in its fight against this epidemic. We recognize that COVID-19 has created unique challenges to your ability to enforce our nation's controlled substances laws, and prevent the diversion of opioids and distribution of illicit fentanyl and synthetic drugs. To better understand this problem, we request that you respond to the following questions no later than October 2, 2020:

- (1) What are the specific ways in which your agency's enforcement responsibilities have been impacted by COVID?

- (2) How has your agency adjusted its operations during the COVID-19 pandemic to address diversion of prescription opioids?
- (3) How has your agency adjusted its operations during the COVID-19 pandemic to address the distribution and sale of illicit fentanyl and synthetic drugs?
- (4) Can you provide statistical information about ongoing or completed investigations during the COVID-19 pandemic as compared to your investigatory workload during "normal" times?
- (5) What legal authority or financial assistance can Congress provide to combat opioid diversion and sales of illicit fentanyl and synthetic drug in the context of COVID-19?

We are grateful for the work you do every day to keep our nation safe and to enforce the law. We look forward to your response and to working with you to find ways to mitigate the opioid epidemic in spite of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sincerely,



Thom Tillis
United States Senator



Shelley Moore Capito
United States Senator



John Cornyn
United States Senator



Joe Manchin III
United States Senator