

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5074

MINORITY (202) 225-5051

<http://oversight.house.gov>

April 11, 2018

President Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I am writing to urge you to finally implement the recommendation made nearly nine months ago by your own Commission on Combating Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis, under the leadership of Governor Chris Christie, to authorize the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) to negotiate directly with drug companies to lower the exorbitant prices they are charging for the lifesaving drug naloxone.

Last week, the Surgeon General of the United States, Vice Admiral Jerome M. Adams, M.D., issued an advisory emphasizing the critical importance of expanding access to naloxone to combat the opioid crisis. He stated:

Expanding the awareness and availability of this medication is a key part of the public health response to the opioid epidemic. ... Therefore, increasing the availability and targeted distribution of naloxone is a critical component of our efforts to reduce opioid-related overdose deaths and, when combined with the availability of effective treatment, to ending the opioid epidemic.¹

On July 31, 2017, your Commission recommended that you “empower the HHS Secretary to negotiate reduced pricing for all governmental units.”² However, you have taken no action to implement this recommendation over the past nine months. More than 50 of us wrote to you on this issue on September 19, 2017, but you failed to respond in any way.³

¹ Department of Health and Human Services, *Surgeon General's Advisory on Naloxone and Opioid Overdose* (Apr. 5, 2018) (online at www.surgeongeneral.gov/priorities/opioid-overdose-prevention/naloxone-advisory.html).

² The President's Commission on Combating Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis, *Interim Report* (July 31, 2017) (online at www.whitehouse.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/ondcp/commission-interim-report.pdf).

³ Letter from Ranking Member Elijah E. Cummings, House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, et al. to President Donald J. Trump (Sept. 19, 2017) (https://democrats-oversight.house.gov/sites/democrats.oversight.house.gov/files/documents/2017-09-19.EEC%20et%20al%20to%20Trump%20re%20Opioid%20National%20Emergency_0.pdf).

On November 28, 2017, Governor Christie testified before the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform and emphasized the urgency of these recommendations. He stated: “There is much that divides political dialogue in our country right now that makes it very difficult for us to get things done. This cannot be one of them.”⁴

The following month, on December 21, 2017, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released new data showing “an unprecedented surge” in the national opioid epidemic.⁵ The expanding opioid crisis is now the single most influential factor driving down overall life expectancy in the United States.⁶

Currently, first responders do not have the naloxone they need to address this crisis. They are being forced to ration this life-saving drug because drug companies have increased their prices.⁷ One formulation has more than doubled in price since 2012, and another increased in price by 95% in 2014. Newer formulations—such as the nasal spray and auto-injector versions—are also being sold at high prices, the former costing \$150 for a two-pack and the latter an astonishing \$4,500 for two doses.⁸

The opioid crisis is the most significant health challenge our nation has faced in a generation. Americans across the country—in blue states and red states—are suffering, and it is time to act. Declaring an emergency is not enough. I ask you to take action now to implement your own Commission’s recommendation—and heed the advice of the Nation’s Doctor—to ensure that this life-saving drug is available to everyone who needs it.

Sincerely,



Elijah E. Cummings
Ranking Member

⁴ House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, *Hearing on Combating the Opioid Crisis*, Testimony of Governor Chris Christie, Chairman, President’s Commission on Combating Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis (Nov. 28, 2017).

⁵ *CDC Releases Grim New Opioid Overdose Figures: ‘We’re Talking About More Than An Exponential Increase,’* Washington Post (Dec. 21, 2017) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2017/12/21/cdc-releases-grim-new-opioid-overdose-figures-were-talking-about-more-than-an-exponential-increase/?utm_term=.5cf8a43edc82).

⁶ *The Opioid Crisis Is Driving Down U.S. Life Expectancy, New Data Shows*, PBS NewsHour (Dec. 21, 2017) (online at www.pbs.org/newshour/health/the-opioid-crisis-is-driving-down-u-s-life-expectancy-new-data-shows).

⁷ *See, e.g., Baltimore City Running Low on Opioid Overdose Remedy*, Washington Post (June 19, 2017) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/local/baltimore-city-running-low-on-opioid-overdoseremedy/2017/06/19/f8334704-5509-11e7-a204-ad706461fa4f_story.html?utm_term=.1f2080c7d128).

⁸ Ravi Gupta, et al., *The Rising Price of Naloxone-Risks to Efforts to Stem Overdose Deaths*, New England Journal of Medicine (Dec. 8, 2016) (online at www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp1609578) (Hospira’s 0.4 mg-per-ml vial (10 ml) has increased in price from \$62.29 to \$142.49; Amphastar’s 1 mg-per-ml vial (2 ml) has increased in price from \$20.34 to \$39.60).