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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

DAVID M. WEINBERG, STAFF DIRECTOR
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LAURA W. KILBRIDE, CHIEF CLERK

February 25, 2022

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations
S-128, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Chris Murphy
Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
131 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Leader Schumer, Chairman Leahy, and Chairman Murphy:

As you finalize the FY 2022 Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Appropriations bill, we urge you to include funding to improve DHS's ability to detect and interdict drugs. The rising death toll attributable to overdoses, driven largely by synthetic opioids, requires a large, comprehensive strategy, which, among other things, addresses demand reduction and promotes recovery. A key part of this effort is reducing the supply of illicit substances, including those that come through our land ports of entry.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) is tasked with targeting and detecting illegal drugs crossing U.S. borders, including synthetic opioids and their precursors. Non-intrusive inspection (NII) systems have been a force multiplier in that effort, enabling CBP to screen or examine an increasing portion of the stream of commercial and passenger traffic, while still facilitating the flow of legitimate trade, cargo, and passengers. In 2019, Congress instructed CBP to come up with a plan to scan 100% of arriving vehicles within six years. CBP's FY21 report on this plan makes it clear that to make progress towards this benchmark, Congress must fund more large-scale NII systems.

Supporting CBP's responsibility to safeguard our borders while securely and efficiently facilitating trade and travel also requires providing support to those that risk their lives to intercept illicit substances and addressing staffing shortages at ports of entry. According to an analysis of CBP data, there is a shortage of almost 800 CBP Officers nationwide. This shortage increases when adjusted for the pre-pandemic workload. Resolving this will not only improve our ability to interdict illegal drugs, but also CBP's capacity to carry out critical immigration, trade and health related duties.

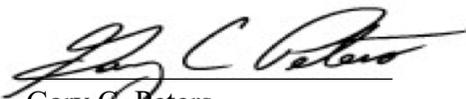
The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
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Finally, as we improve CBP's ability to scan vehicles entering the United States and interdict illegal drugs, we must proportionately increase Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Homeland Security Investigation's (HSI) capacity to take on resulting investigations. HSI is responsible for investigating and going after the transnational criminal organizations trafficking drugs into the country, which is critical to curbing the supply. Therefore, we must properly resource HSI to ensure that it is ready to investigate higher numbers of interdictions that will follow higher rates of scanning.

Congress has an opportunity to reaffirm its resolution to take on the overdose and addiction epidemic by, among other things, investing in efforts that will reduce the supply of illicit substances in the United States. This is an urgent priority and our funding should reflect our commitment to taking a bold approach to reducing overdoses and saving lives. We look forward to engaging with you to reaffirm this commitment.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

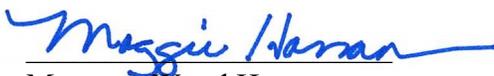
Sincerely,



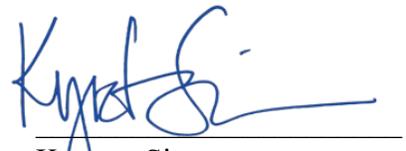
Gary C. Peters
Chairman

/s/

Thomas R. Carper
United States Senator



Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



Kyrsten Sinema
United States Senator



Jacky Rosen
United States Senator