

# United States Senate

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

CHRISTOPHER R. HIXON, STAFF DIRECTOR  
MARGARET E. DAUM, MINORITY STAFF DIRECTOR

November 6, 2017

Kevin K. McAleenan  
Acting Commissioner  
U.S. Customs and Border Protection  
1300 Pennsylvania Ave. NW  
Washington, DC 20229

Dear Mr. McAleenan:

The opioid epidemic in the United States is a public health crisis that has claimed the lives of too many Americans. In St. Louis, Missouri, the number of deaths attributed to opioids has at least quadrupled between 2007 and 2016.<sup>1</sup> Between 2006 and 2015, deadly heroin overdoses in Wisconsin increased by 880 percent, from 0.5 to 4.9 per 100,000 people.<sup>2</sup> We write to request information about the work of Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to identify and prevent illicit opioids from entering the country.

As the opioid crisis has spread, it has evolved to include not just prescription opioids and heroin, but also synthetic opioids like fentanyl, which are more potent and deadly. Provisional 2016 data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that “[d]rug deaths involving fentanyl more than doubled from 2015 to 2016,” and “deaths involving synthetic opioids, mostly fentanyls, have risen to more than 20,000 from 3,000 in just three years.”<sup>3</sup> According to data from county health departments in 24 of the nation’s largest cities, “fentanyl-related overdose deaths increased nearly 600 percent from 2014 to 2016.”<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> *A Mass Killer: St. Louis Heroin Deaths Hit New High*, St. Louis Post-Dispatch (Feb. 20, 2017) ([www.stltoday.com/news/local/metro/a-mass-killer-st-louis-heroin-deaths-hit-new-high/article\\_2fd6130c-3c35-524a-891e-e51eff2e40b4.html](http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/metro/a-mass-killer-st-louis-heroin-deaths-hit-new-high/article_2fd6130c-3c35-524a-891e-e51eff2e40b4.html)).

<sup>2</sup> Wisconsin Department of Health Services, *Select Opioid-Related Morbidity and Mortality Data for Wisconsin* (Nov. 2016) ([www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p01690.pdf](http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p01690.pdf)).

<sup>3</sup> *The First Count of Fentanyl Deaths in 2016: Up 540% in Three Years*, New York Times (Sept. 2, 2017) ([www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/09/02/upshot/fentanyl-drug-overdose-deaths.html](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/09/02/upshot/fentanyl-drug-overdose-deaths.html)).

<sup>4</sup> *Fentanyl Linked to Thousands of Urban Overdose Deaths*, Washington Post (Aug. 15, 2017) ([www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2017/national/fentanyl-overdoses/?utm\\_term=.53550f41a21d](http://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2017/national/fentanyl-overdoses/?utm_term=.53550f41a21d)).

When fentanyl and other illicit opioids are smuggled into the country, CBP is the first line of defense for detecting and seizing the drugs before they can make it to American communities. Our ability to identify and stop this flow into the United States depends on both the men and women of CBP who identify suspicious packages and people, and the tools and technology that allow them to do so. In particular, CBP leadership has been active in working with USPS on improving screening methods for inbound international mail, using a combination of advanced electronic data, new technology and traditional screening methods.<sup>5</sup> In September 2017, following multiple Congressional requests, CBP and USPS finalized a Memorandum of Understanding on the cooperation between the two entities to secure international mail.<sup>6</sup>

Every day, CBP faces smugglers who find new and covert methods for getting these drugs across our borders and into the hands of Americans. To better understand the scope of this problem and CBP's efforts to prevent these dangerous and deadly substances from entering the country illegally, we request the following information:

1. The number of fentanyl, fentanyl analogue, heroin, or other opioid seizures each year, by month between January 1, 2012, and October 1, 2017. For each seizure, please provide the type of opioid, the amount seized, the method of transport, and the location of seizure.
2. A description of any trends that CBP has identified that are affecting CBP's ability to detect illicit opioid shipments and how CBP adapts to meet these emerging threats.
3. Recommendations for how Congress can help ensure that CBP has the resources necessary to stop these dangerous substances from entering our country.

We request that you provide this information as soon as possible, but in no event later than November 22, 2017.

If you have any questions regarding this request, please ask your staff to contact Caitlin Warner of the Committee Minority Staff at [Caitlin\\_Warner@hsgac.senate.gov](mailto:Caitlin_Warner@hsgac.senate.gov) and Joske Bautista of the Committee Majority Staff at [Joske\\_Bautista@hsgac.senate.gov](mailto:Joske_Bautista@hsgac.senate.gov). Please send any official correspondence to both staffers.

---

<sup>5</sup> House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, Subcommittee on Government Operations, *Examining the Shipment of Illicit Drugs in International Mail*, 115<sup>th</sup> Cong. (Sept. 7, 2017) (Testimony of Todd C. Owen, Executive Assistant Commissioner, Office of Field Operations, U.S. Customs and Border Protection).

<sup>6</sup> Memorandum of Understanding between Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Customs and Border Protection and the U.S. Postal Service Regarding Cooperation in the Inspection of Goods Imported or Exported through the Post (Sept. 9, 2017) (*on file with Committee*).

Kevin K. McAleenan

November 6, 2017

Page 3

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Claire McCaskill". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Claire" and last name "McCaskill" clearly distinguishable.

Claire McCaskill  
Ranking Member

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Ron Johnson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ron" and last name "Johnson" clearly distinguishable.

Ron Johnson  
Chairman