

June 2, 2016

Mr. Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States
U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO)
441 G. Street NW - Room 7100
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

We write to request that GAO conduct a review of federal and state oversight of sober living homes. These properties – also known as transitional homes or three-quarter homes¹ – serve as residences and provide recovery services to individuals with substance use disorders.² Sober living home staff may also help tenant's access outpatient substance abuse treatment and recovery services, such as medication-assisted treatment.³

Many states have little to no regulations for sober living homes, placing these facilities in a regulatory gap; they are not considered to be half-way houses, standard living accommodations, nor substance abuse treatment facilities.⁴ There are numerous unanswered questions about how many sober living homes exist, the type of recovery services they provide, the standards under which they operate, and their interaction with Medicaid or other federally funded health care programs. We are particularly concerned about allegations of "kickbacks" received by sober home administrators for referrals of residents to Medicaid-funded drug and alcohol treatment programs.⁵

The ongoing opioid epidemic has fueled a high demand for substance abuse services, and it is critical that individuals receive the care they need, and that facilities purporting to help individuals with substance use disorders are actually doing so. Amidst this epidemic, states are facing fiscal and regulatory obstacles to providing adequate access to treatment and recovery services for those with substance use disorders. It is therefore important that we provide transparency and information about these sober living homes to ensure responsible stewardship of limited taxpayer dollars, protect vulnerable populations, and promote public health.

¹ <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/01/nyregion/new-york-city-task-force-to-investigate-three-quarter-homes.html>

² <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3057870/>

³ https://www.buzzfeed.com/catferguson/addiction-marketplace?utm_term=.pam9kKK2Dg#.be9y1xxqW5

⁴ <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/01/nyregion/new-york-city-task-force-to-investigate-three-quarter-homes.html>

⁵ http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/31/nyregion/three-quarter-housing-a-choice-for-recovering-addicts-or-homelessness.html?_r=0

We request that the GAO assess the following questions:

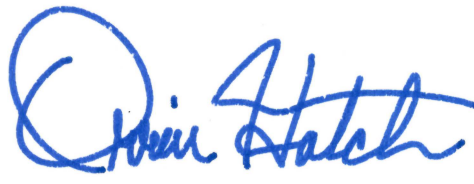
1. How many sober living homes are there in the United States? How many individuals do they serve and what are the characteristics of this population?
2. How are sober living homes regulated at the federal, state, and local level?
3. What is the range of services offered by sober living homes? Are sober living homes being used to expand the available resources to support recovery from substance use disorder? What is known about the effectiveness of services offered through sober living homes?
4. How do sober living homes and their patients interact with Medicaid and other federally funded healthcare programs? What impact does this have on Medicaid costs and on the effectiveness of Medicaid-funded drug and alcohol-abuse treatment programs?

Sober living homes can be an effective recovery service for those suffering from substance use disorder, but little is known about how this cottage industry functions overall.⁶ Additional information about the sober living homes will help us to provide proper oversight to ensure that individuals with substance abuse disorders are receiving the care they need.

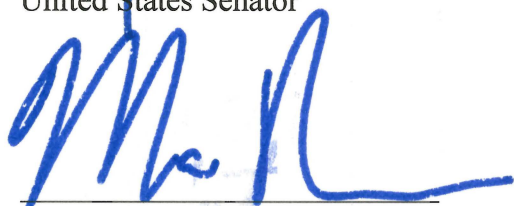
Sincerely,



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Orrin Hatch
United States Senator



Marco Rubio
United States Senator

⁶ <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2860009/>