

ELIZABETH WARREN  
MASSACHUSETTS

COMMITTEES:  
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HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR, AND PENSIONS  
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SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

United States Senate

UNITED STATES SENATE  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2105  
P: 202-224-4543

2400 JFK FEDERAL BUILDING  
15 NEW SUDBURY STREET  
BOSTON, MA 02203  
P: 617-565-3170

1550 MAIN STREET  
SUITE 406  
SPRINGFIELD, MA 01103  
P: 413-788-2690

[www.warren.senate.gov](http://www.warren.senate.gov)

December 4, 2017

The Honorable John F. Kelly  
Chief of Staff  
The White House  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear General Kelly,

I am writing today to seek clarification on Kellyanne Conway's role in leading the White House's efforts to fight the opioid epidemic. Earlier this week, at a Department of Justice press conference announcing "stepped up efforts to address the drug and opioid crisis,"<sup>1</sup> Attorney General Sessions stated that the President has "asked [Conway] to coordinate and lead the effort [to combat the opioid crisis] from the White House." He also described Conway's "total access" to the President on this issue and said he believed "her appointment represents a very significant commitment from the President himself and his White House."<sup>2</sup> Attorney General Sessions also said Ms. Conway "is exceedingly talented," and "understands messaging."<sup>3</sup> According to a report by CBS news, the White House later stated that her role was "not expanding and opioids has always been part of her policy portfolio,"<sup>4</sup> after multiple news outlets reported that she would be the White House's "drug czar."<sup>5</sup>

As you know, the opioid epidemic is one of the most important public health matters facing our country. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there are 91 opioid

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Justice, Office of Public Affairs, "Attorney General Sessions and Acting DEA Administrator Patterson Announce New Tools to Address Opioid Crisis" (November 29, 2017) (online at <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/attorney-general-sessions-and-acting-dea-administrator-patterson-announce-new-tools-address-0>).

<sup>2</sup> "Sessions praises Kellyanne Conway's leadership of White House opioid effort," *Washington Post* (November 29, 2017) (online at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/video/politics/sessions-praises-kellyanne-conways-leadership-of-white-house-opioid-effort/2017/11/29/4a8ff4b0-d526-11e7-9ad9-ca0619edfa05\\_video.html?utm\\_term=.56ca4093cb19](https://www.washingtonpost.com/video/politics/sessions-praises-kellyanne-conways-leadership-of-white-house-opioid-effort/2017/11/29/4a8ff4b0-d526-11e7-9ad9-ca0619edfa05_video.html?utm_term=.56ca4093cb19)).

<sup>3</sup> "Sessions praises Kellyanne Conway's leadership of White House opioid effort," *Washington Post* (November 29, 2017) (online at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/video/politics/sessions-praises-kellyanne-conways-leadership-of-white-house-opioid-effort/2017/11/29/4a8ff4b0-d526-11e7-9ad9-ca0619edfa05\\_video.html?utm\\_term=.56ca4093cb19](https://www.washingtonpost.com/video/politics/sessions-praises-kellyanne-conways-leadership-of-white-house-opioid-effort/2017/11/29/4a8ff4b0-d526-11e7-9ad9-ca0619edfa05_video.html?utm_term=.56ca4093cb19)).

<sup>4</sup> Haley Britzky, "Conway will oversee opioid epidemic response, Sessions says," *Axios* (November 29, 2017) (online at <https://www.axios.com/conway-appointed-to-oversee-opioid-epidemic-2513627442.html>).

<sup>5</sup> Jacqueline Alemany, @JaxAlemany, "WH says that Conway is not Trump's 'Opioids Czar'—this is just a part of her policy portfolio as it has been for several months now. Sessions did not use that language this morning either," *Twitter* (November 29, 2017) (online at <https://twitter.com/JaxAlemany/status/936014771987668992>).

overdose deaths every day.<sup>6</sup> A 2016 Surgeon General report found that only one in ten people in need of specialty treatment for addiction can actually get it,<sup>7</sup> and a recent Pew survey found that almost half of all U.S. adults have had someone close to them – a friend or family member – suffer from an addiction at one time.<sup>8</sup>

This crisis requires swift, decisive action from the Trump Administration to support addiction patients, their families, and their communities that are struggling to find long-term solutions. While the White House has made numerous announcements about the opioid crisis, including the release of recommendations from the President’s Commission on Combating Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis<sup>9</sup> and the formal declaration of a national public health emergency,<sup>10</sup> these steps are not adequate without critical funding and strong, experienced leadership.

I hope that Ms. Conway can provide that leadership, and I kindly request that you answer the following questions to provide clarification on Ms. Conway’s current role, her experience, and additional Administration plans to address the opioid crisis:

1. What are Ms. Conway’s current duties at the White House?
2. What additional duties will she take on her newly announced role as coordinator and leader of White House opioid efforts?
  - a. What other White House staff have been assigned to this efforts?
  - b. To whom will Ms. Conway report in this role?
  - c. How will she coordinate with and interact with other public health officials in the Administration? Has the White House established any formal protocols for her to do so?
  - d. How will she coordinate, communicate, and work with Members of Congress?

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<sup>6</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Drug overdose deaths in the United States continue to increase in 2015” (online at <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/epidemic/index.html>).

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, U.S. Surgeon General, *Facing Addiction in America: The Surgeon General’s Report on Alcohol, Drugs, and Health* (2016) (online at <https://addiction.surgeongeneral.gov/surgeon-generals-report.pdf>).

<sup>8</sup> John Gramlich, “Nearly half of Americans have a family member or close friend who’s been addicted to drugs,” *Pew Research Center* (October 26, 2017) (online at <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/10/26/nearly-half-of-americans-have-a-family-member-or-close-friend-whos-been-addicted-to-drugs/>).

<sup>9</sup> Report of the President’s Commission on Combating Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis (November 1, 2017) (online at [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/images/Final\\_Report\\_Draft\\_11-1-2017.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/images/Final_Report_Draft_11-1-2017.pdf)).

<sup>10</sup> Julie Hirschfeld Davis, “Trump Declares Opioid Crisis a ‘Health Emergency’ but Requests no Funds,” *New York Times* (October 26, 2017) (online at [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/26/us/politics/trump-opioid-crisis.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/26/us/politics/trump-opioid-crisis.html?_r=0)).

- e. What deliverables is she responsible for providing to administration official and the public?
  - f. What specific goals will be used to measure her success in her new role?
3. Has Conway led or coordinated any interagency efforts to address the opioid epidemic? If so, please describe her coordination efforts in detail, including the specific agencies that Ms. Conway has worked with.
  4. Does Ms. Conway have any previous experience working in public health, or working with drug or addiction policy? Does she have any experience managing a public health agency or organization in government or the private sector? If so, please describe her public health experience in detail. If not, please clarify why the Administration has provided her with this apparent role.
  5. Following the President's announcement of a public health emergency on opioids, Ms. Conway stated that "the best way to stop people from dying from overdoses and drug abuse is by not starting in the first place."<sup>11</sup> While this type of prevention is one long-term tool in addressing the opioid crisis, it does not support the millions of Americans currently suffering from addiction that require treatment. Please describe in detail the Administration's plan to provide evidence-based treatment, including the life-saving drug naloxone and medication-assisted treatment.
  6. In a June interview on ABC's This Week with George Stephanopoulos, when asked about proposed cuts to Medicaid and the lack of federal funding available, Ms. Conway stated that "pouring money into the problem is not the only answer," and that "it takes money and it also takes a four letter word called will" to address the opioid addiction crisis.<sup>12</sup> These statements are extremely concerning, as they minimize the importance of federal resources for addiction treatment and suggest a deep misunderstanding of substance use disorder patients. It is equally concerning that Ms. Conway may now play a substantial role in guiding the Administration on opioids after making these comments.
    - a. Does the Administration agree with Ms. Conway's June statement that "will" is an answer to the opioid epidemic?
    - b. Does the Administration plan to make requests to Congress for federal funding to combat the opioid crisis, in line with the suggestion by public health and safety experts that we require a multi-billion dollar fund for these efforts?

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<sup>11</sup> Melina Delkic, "Kellyanne Conway Will Run White House's Opioid Crisis Efforts," *Newsweek* (November 29, 2017) (online at <http://www.newsweek.com/kellyanne-conway-lead-white-house-opioid-crisis-efforts-726249>).

<sup>12</sup> Equals Four Media, "Kellyanne Conway: It Takes WILL To Solve Opioid Crisis, Not Money [THIS WEEK with Stephanopoulos]," *YouTube* (June 25, 2017) (online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-t7IDNVK6ZY>).

- c. What is the Administration's position on cutting Medicaid programs that are critical to patients receiving addiction treatment?
7. In August, alongside former HHS Secretary Price, Conway called the opioid crisis "very complicated" and stated "we are on the losing side of this war."<sup>13</sup> These are concerning characterizations to make, given the failure of the so-called "war on drugs" and the impact this type of rhetoric has on the stigmatization of addiction patients. Does the Administration agree with Ms. Conway's assessment of the opioid crisis as a "war?"
8. As you know, any interagency efforts to address the opioid crisis, as well as outlining the Administration's opioid strategy, are generally duties of the White House Director of National Drug Control Policy. What is your timeline for nominating a qualified individual with experience in public health to this role?
9. The Administration has yet to nominate someone to lead the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), another critical agency that needs to show leadership in efforts to support public health and law enforcement officials. What is your timeline for nominating a qualified individual that appreciates evidence-based enforcement techniques and understands the modern role of the DEA to this position?

The opioid epidemic will only continue to grow and affect Americans all across this country, unless we work in a bipartisan manner to provide evidence-based policy solutions and much-needed federal dollars to combat this crisis. This requires strong leadership from an experienced public health official. I ask that you respond to this request by December 18, 2017.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator

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<sup>13</sup>James Oliphant, "Trump vows to 'win' against opioid epidemic, offers no new steps," *Reuters* (August 8, 2017) (online at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-opioid/trump-vows-to-win-against-opioid-epidemic-offers-no-new-steps-idUSKBN1AO18A>).