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MEMBER OF CONGRESS
14TH DISTRICT OF OHIO

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, D.C.

COMMITTEE ON
APPROPRIATIONS

August 17, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
1236 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Republican Leader
United States House of Representatives
2468 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Leader McCarthy,

As we grapple with navigating the unprecedented challenges caused by the coronavirus pandemic, another public health emergency continues to devastate communities across the country: the opioid crisis. The opioid crisis has been breaking apart families and threatening the safety of our communities for decades, with opioid-related overdose deaths having more than quadrupled since 1999.

Over the past several years, I have been proud of Congress' bipartisan work to advance recovery and treatment efforts and prevent the trafficking of lethal, illicit opioids like fentanyl. I was even prouder when, in 2018, those efforts resulted in our nation's first decline in drug overdose deaths in nearly 30 years.

Tragically, that progress is slipping away.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) preliminary 2019 overdose death data shows that fatal overdoses hit a record high last year, accounting for the deaths of 70,980 Americans. More than half of those deaths - 36,500 to be exact - involved synthetic opioids such as fentanyl.

In total, 37 states saw fatal overdoses increase or remain stable from 2018. This trend is ongoing this year as the coronavirus pandemic continues to impact the mental health and economic security of Americans across the country. An analysis released by the White House last month found that overdose deaths were up by 11.4% from January to April of this year when compared with the same period in 2019.

These are more than just statistics. These are real people – mothers and fathers, sons and daughters – and their deaths are causing real pain in communities across our nation. Back home, a young man who had been sober for nearly two years relapsed after the pandemic began and the place where he worked had to close its doors. Michael died at the end of March at just 31-years-old with both fentanyl and carfentanyl in his system.

I recently saw Michael's mom Cathy on the local news speaking out about her son's death, bringing awareness to not only the lack of attention focused on the opioid crisis right now, but also the limited resources available to combat addiction during the pandemic and the continued rise of synthetic opioids like those found in Michael's system when he died.

We must act swiftly to redouble our efforts to stop this crisis in its tracks. Specifically, I write to ask that my legislation the Comprehensive Opioid Program Extension (COPE) Act, be brought to the House floor for a vote.

As you know, battling this epidemic requires an all-of-the-above approach that includes not only prevention and education efforts, but also promotes treatment, cracks down on illegal distribution, and enhances resources for first responders and law enforcement. My bill would accomplish that by increasing the authorized resources available to the Department of Justice's comprehensive opioid abuse grant program by \$70 million per year from 2020 through 2024, bringing the total provided annually for these grants to \$400,000,000. These grants help local communities battle the opioid epidemic by:

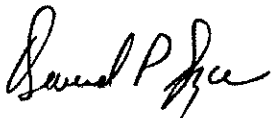
- providing training and resources for first responders on opioid overdose reversal drugs and devices;
- enhancing collaboration between state criminal justice agencies and substance abuse agencies;
- enhancing law enforcement efforts to combat the illegal distribution of opioids;
- and developing or expanding programs to prevent youth opioid abuse, drug take-back initiatives, or for treatment alternatives to incarceration.

The harsh reality is that all of us knows someone who has been impacted by this crisis. And with the coronavirus pandemic already causing an increase in fatal overdoses when compared to last year's record high, Congressional action is overdue.

We must advance legislative solutions that allow Democrats and Republicans to join together in a bipartisan effort to defeat the opioid crisis – a solution like the COPE Act.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you on this critical and timely subject.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David P. Joyce". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "David" being more prominent.

David P. Joyce
Member of Congress