

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3003

April 11, 2017

Dear Governor Christie, Senate President Sweeney, Speaker Prieto, Minority Leader Kean, and Minority Leader Bramnick:

I am grateful for the groundbreaking steps you have all helped our state government take to address the opioid epidemic in our great state. As the co-chair of the Bipartisan Heroin Task Force in the House of Representatives, I applaud the energy and resolve you have shown in this matter and I commit to continuing to do my part in Congress.

Drug overdoses kill over 52,000 Americans every year. Over 128,000 New Jerseyans suffer from addiction. As you reflect on what steps remain to be taken, I want to draw your attention to an important problem that still needs to be addressed – the difficulty of treating people who are not currently capable of seeking or choosing the help they need.

Over the past several months I have been in touch with Lisa Vandegrift, a Burlington County mother who lost her twenty year old daughter, Sabrina, to a drug overdose. Lisa and her husband, Bill, tried everything they could to save their daughter, but they found, as so many families do, that someone suffering from substance addiction often cannot adequately assess their own condition or choose to seek the help they need. Lisa has asked me if there was any way I could help her enact some type of legislation in New Jersey that would allow courts to mandate in-patient treatment for those refusing help.

More than thirty states have laws in place that would allow for the involuntary commitment of those struggling with substance abuse. These state laws vary in the details, but they generally provide an avenue of last resort for families trying to help someone who cannot or will not seek help for themselves. Typically these legal processes include numerous safeguards to ensure the process is used properly. For example, some legislation limits the length of time an individual can be committed to treatment, requires multiple physicians to sign off on the medical need for treatment, and provides appeal rights for those committed, etc. Absent a committal process of this kind, there is often no way to get someone treatment who is unable to see their need for it. Passing legislation of this kind in New Jersey would give people another tool to help their loved ones get help.

This type of legislation is helping save lives daily across the country and I am hopeful that residents of New Jersey will soon have this option available to them and their families. I am asking you to prioritize the creation of a careful, fair, well-crafted involuntary commitment process. I am willing to help in any way possible as you work through this and any other issues facing New Jersey.

Thank you for your leadership and support on this incredibly important issue.

Best Regards,



Tom MacArthur
Member of Congress