

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 24, 2017

The Honorable John Boozman
Chairman
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington DC, 20510

The Honorable Jon Tester
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington DC, 20510

Dear Chairman Boozman and Ranking Member Tester:

As the Subcommittee begins deliberations on the Fiscal Year 2018 Homeland Security Appropriations Legislation, we ask your support to increase the screening capabilities of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to detect deadly illicit fentanyl crossing our borders. We know that you share our dedication to combatting the opioid epidemic that is harming communities across the United States, and we appreciate your consideration of this request.

Fentanyl is a particularly deadly synthetic opioid, up to 50 times stronger than heroin and 100 times stronger than morphine. It is so powerful that even a few grains can be deadly. Between 2014 and 2015, deaths involving synthetic opioids, which include fentanyl, increased by 72 percent, taking more than 9,500 lives. The influx of this deadly drug has overwhelmed both law enforcement and health officials — already struggling with an opioid epidemic fueled by prescription drugs and heroin.

Although pharmaceutical fentanyl can be misused, most fentanyl deaths are linked to illicitly manufactured fentanyl. According to the Drug Enforcement Administration, Mexico is the primary source for illicit fentanyl trafficked into the United States, while Chinese distributors are the source of the precursor chemicals used to manufacture the drug. Fentanyl produced illicitly in Mexico is smuggled across the southwest border of the United States or delivered through the mail and express consignment couriers. Fentanyl purchased online from overseas vendors is principally shipped to the United States through the mail or express consignment carriers, often concealed within legitimate goods.

CBP has had success interdicting fentanyl and other synthetic opioids with hi-tech chemical screening devices and the support of scientists in CBP laboratories, but CBP needs more of these resources to catch and stop more of these deadly drugs from coming into the United States. By providing CBP with additional portable chemical screening devices at ports of entry and consignment facilities, we can increase CBP's ability to intercept fentanyl and other synthetic opioids at the border. Additional equipment and scientists in CBP laboratories will increase its ability to rapidly interpret screening test results from the field and perform more robust testing. Combined, these resources will help safeguard field personnel from exposure to these deadly drugs and prevent them from entering the country.

We must give CBP the help it needs to stop illicit fentanyl from getting into the country. Therefore, we respectfully ask that the Subcommittee consider appropriating additional funds for this critically important task.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

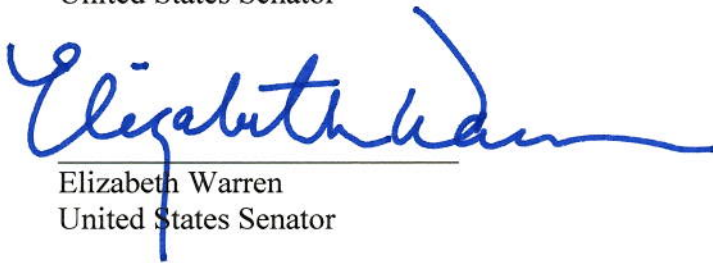
Sincerely,



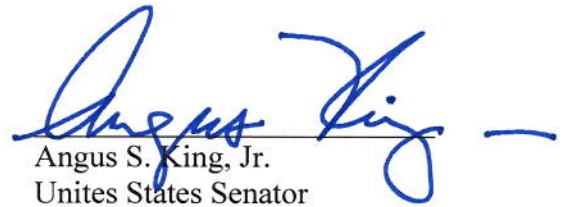
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Elizabeth Warren
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Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



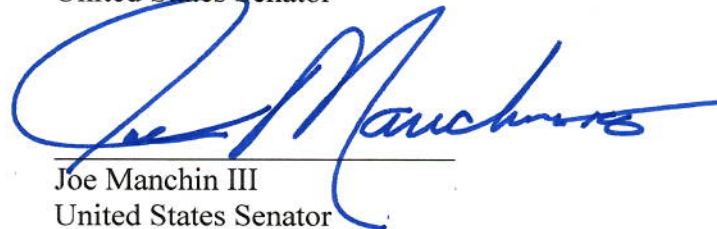
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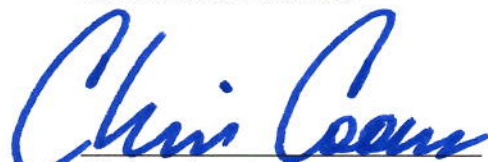
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