

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

May 6, 2021

The Honorable Janet Yellen  
Secretary of the Treasury  
U.S. Department of the Treasury  
1500 Pennsylvania Ave NW  
Washington, DC 20220

Dear Secretary Yellen,

We write to urge that any guidance clarifying permissible uses of the *American Rescue Plan's* State and Local Government Fiscal Recovery Fund clearly allows recipient governments to spend those awards to combat the worsening overdose crisis. State and local governments are on the front lines of responding to overdoses, a crisis intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic, and they need maximum flexibility to use every resource available to them to provide mental health and addiction treatment supports.

When COVID-19 began disrupting daily life for Americans in March 2020, public health and safety officials raised the alarm that the lockdowns and social distancing necessary to fighting the coronavirus could exacerbate the mental and behavioral health crises our communities are already facing. Sudden lockdowns increased isolation and economic distress and at the same time curtailed access to face-to-face mental health treatment and addiction recovery supports.

Provisional data, available only recently, is beginning to show the extent to which public health officials' fears about the worsening opioid crisis have come true. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Vital Statistics System (NVSS) estimates there were more than 90,000 overdose deaths in the 12-month period ending in September 2020. This would be a record high and represent a nearly 30% increase over the previous 12-month period's death toll. Most of these deaths were caused by synthetic opioids like fentanyl.<sup>1</sup> The NVSS projects that nearly every state in the country will suffer an increase in overdose deaths. In Virginia alone, overdose deaths are projected to have increased by more than 40% during the most recent 12-month period.

As the opioid crisis worsened, the COVID-19 pandemic placed unprecedented strain on state, local, territorial, and tribal budgets, hampering their ability to plan and carry-out a robust and long-term response. In the American Rescue Plan, Congress responded to these concerns by appropriating \$350 billion to the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund to support states' and localities' responses to the COVID-19 public health emergency. While Congress placed limitations on how governments can use these funds to ensure they are responsive to the effects of the COVID-19 public

---

<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control National Vital Statistics Prevention System Rapid Release: Provisional Drug Overdose Death Counts. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm>

health emergency, Treasury is charged with providing additional guidance to governments about how these funds can be used consistent with Congressional intent.

Last year's unprecedented escalation of the opioid crisis is almost certainly linked to the COVID-19 pandemic, and Treasury should make clear in its upcoming guidance to state and local governments that fighting the addiction crisis is an acceptable use of awards from the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Fund as was intended by Congress when it passed the *American Rescue Plan*. Treasury should allow states, tribes, and territories to use *American Rescue Plan* awards to provide supplemental funding to their mental and behavioral health authorities, and work with localities to identify creative ways to support their own responses to the overdose crisis.

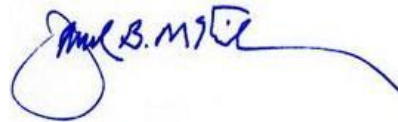
It is imperative that every level of government work in harmony to combat this staggering increase in overdose deaths. Thank you for your leadership during these challenging times and we would welcome the opportunity to discuss this issue further.

Sincerely,



---

Abigail D. Spanberger  
Member of Congress



---

David McKinley  
Member of Congress



---

David Trone  
Member of Congress



---

Madeleine Dean  
Member of Congress



---

Susan Wild  
Member of Congress



---

David N. Cicilline  
Member of Congress



---

Alex X. Mooney  
Member of Congress

