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October 30, 2019

The Honorable James W. Carroll Jr.
Director
Office of National Drug Control Policy
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20201

The Honorable Uttam Dhillon
Acting Administrator
Drug Enforcement Administration
8701 Morrisette Drive
Springfield, VA 22152

Dear Director Carroll and Acting Administrator Dhillon,

I write to express my deep concern over the drug and overdose crisis that is gripping the southwestern region of Missouri, and to ask that your respective agencies act immediately to address this issue in my state.

Southwest Missouri is facing a growing drug epidemic. In Springfield, Missouri, recent crime statistics show heroin seizures by law enforcement have surged in the past three years, going from approximately 400 grams seized in 2015 to over 4,000 grams in 2016.¹ Methamphetamine seizures continue to climb in the area, with much of it originating from Mexico.² Even more troubling, the area is seeing increasing amounts of fentanyl.³ This rise in drug trafficking has predictably and tragically led to an increase in overdoses and deaths in the region. In the last week alone, Greene County, Missouri, has seen 40 overdoses related to a suspected batch of fentanyl, leading to 4 fatalities so far.⁴

Your agencies lead the federal government's response to drug trafficking and addiction. The Drug Enforcement Administration ("DEA") is the chief agency charged with enforcing our nation's controlled-substance laws. The White House's Office of National Drug Control Policy ("ONDCP"), likewise, is tasked with coordinating and leading our national drug policy.

¹ Springfield Police Annual Report 2016, available at <https://www.springfieldmo.gov/DocumentCenter/View/29961/2016-Annual-Report-?bidId=>.

² *Id.*

³ "City of Springfield and Greene County take next steps to address opioid crisis," available at <https://greenecountymo.gov/files/PDF/file.pdf?id=32523>.

⁴ "Greene County medical examiner confirms fourth overdose death in last week," KSPR, available at <https://www.kspr.com/content/news/Greene-County-medical-examiner-confirms-fourth-overdose-death-in-last-week-563787841.html?ref=841> (Oct. 24, 2019).

Both of your agencies have a laudable history of working with Missouri's state and local partners, who heroically face these challenges day after day to keep people in my state safe. Local law enforcement in southwest Missouri has undertaken a herculean effort to combat drug trafficking in the area. Their commitment to collaboration in combating drug crime has served Missourians well, but they are currently facing unknown sources of fentanyl in the region, among other challenges with illicit drugs.

To help address the opioid crisis, the DEA has recently developed heroin-fentanyl enforcement teams.⁵ These specialized teams of agents, although based in cities and towns hardest hit by opioids, are not geographically limited, and they bring much-needed assistance to localities affected by these drugs. The DEA's expertise and manpower complement and reinforce local law enforcement's efforts.

I am requesting that DEA deploy personnel and investigative resources from these heroin-fentanyl enforcement teams, or from other parts of the agency, to Missouri to investigate this spate of overdoses and deaths. The DEA's help is especially needed to identify the origin and distribution operation of the drug.

In addition to DEA's law-enforcement resources, ONDCP provides critical financial support as the administrating agency of the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTA) program. The HIDTA region covering Missouri, however, fails to adequately deal with the current drug problem in my state. It consists of 72 counties spread across 7 states—stretching approximately 1,000 miles from northwest North Dakota to southeast Missouri.⁶ The Midwest HIDTA is also one of the most populous HIDTAs in the country, encompassing over 15 million people.⁷ The structure and size of the Midwest HIDTA hinders the effective coordination and distribution of resources to fight drug trafficking in Missouri and throughout the region.

The Director of ONDCP has the authority to designate as HIDTAs areas of the country where drug trafficking and distribution is significant and harming the area.⁸ Consistent with those authorities, I urge ONDCP to consider designating a new HIDTA that concentrates on counties in southwest Missouri and other nearby areas affected by major drug trafficking in Missouri, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Kansas. This new HIDTA would bring to bear the necessary resources to prevent, investigate, and treat the area's drug-trafficking challenges.

Both of your agencies are tasked with protecting Americans from the scourge of illegal drugs and addiction. In the face of this worsening drug crisis, it is incumbent on all of government to redouble our efforts and to help Americans in need. Deploying the necessary resources to impacted parts of Missouri should be part of that effort.

⁵ "DEA Establishes Six New Heroin Enforcement Teams," available at <https://www.dea.gov/press-releases/2017/10/27/dea-establishes-six-new-heroin-enforcement-teams-0> (Oct. 27, 2017).

⁶ 2018 Midwest HIDTA Threat Assessment, available at <https://www.dhs.state.il.us/OneNetLibrary/27896/documents/2018MidwestHIDTAThreatAssessment.pdf>.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ Office of National Drug Control Reauthorization Act of 2006 (Pub. L. 109-469).

Thank you for your prompt attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,



Josh Hawley
U.S. Senator