

AFL-CIO

LEGISLATIVE ALERT

May 5, 2019

The Honorable Elizabeth Warren
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Elijah Cummings
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Warren and Representative Cummings:

On behalf of the AFL-CIO, I write in strong support of the Comprehensive Addiction Resources Emergency (CARE) Act which you have introduced. This bill constitutes a comprehensive public health response to the opioids crisis. It provides urgently-needed resources to fill our nation's yawning gaps in treatment and prevention services, and it recognizes the importance of engaging workers in the workplace to prevent opioid misuse or to help them secure employment when recovering from opioid use disorder (OUD). Further, the bill also addresses the risks faced by frontline behavioral health care workers.

The urgency of addressing the opioids crisis cannot be overstated. In 2017, 47,600 Americans died from an opioid overdose, while thousands more suffered directly or indirectly from the impacts of OUDs on families and communities. Unfortunately, we have failed to muster a comprehensive national response to the crisis.

Your CARE Act represents a well-targeted major response to the crisis. Directly modeled after the Ryan White Act – which successfully addressed the HIV/AIDS epidemic – the CARE Act strategically distributes resources while providing flexibility for states and localities to implement approaches that meet their unique needs.

Importantly, the CARE Act also provides resources to link prevention, early intervention, and recovery services with the workplace. Unfortunately, the root cause of many OUDs is workplace injury. Opioids are too often prescribed to alleviate the pain associated with such injuries, particularly musculoskeletal disorders, resulting in overuse and addiction. Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that certain occupations, many with elevated work-related injury rates, are associated with high levels of opioid-related overdose deaths: including construction, mining, oil and gas extraction, and health care. Workplace-focused interventions and research are needed to address the link between work and opioid misuse and to help workers in recovery gain or maintain employment.

America's labor unions are currently delivering high quality workplace-based prevention, treatment, and recovery services. The CARE Act provides \$40 million a year for programs supporting workers which can be used to support union-administered programs as well as efforts by employers.

The CARE Act also provides funding to support research that will identify key factors involved in ensuring the health and safety of frontline behavioral health care workers. We must care for our care providers to effectively fight this crisis.

We thank you for introducing this important legislation, and we look forward to working with you to get it enacted.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "William Samuel".

William Samuel, Director
Government Affairs

American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations

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