

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 20, 2021

Representative Bryan Cutler
Pennsylvania Speaker of the House
139 Main Capitol Building
P.O. Box 202100
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2100

Senator Jake Corman
Pennsylvania Senate President Pro Tempore
350 Main Capitol
Senate Box 203034
Harrisburg, PA 17120-3034

Representative Kerry A. Benninghoff
Pennsylvania House Majority Leader
110 Main Capitol Building
P.O. Box 202171
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2171

Senator Kim Ward
Pennsylvania Senate Majority Leader
292 Main Capitol
Senate Box 203039
Harrisburg, PA 17120-3039

Representative Joanna E. McClinton
Pennsylvania House Minority Leader
423 Main Capitol
P.O. Box 202191
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2191

Senator Jay Costa
Pennsylvania Senate Minority Leader
535 Main Capitol
Senate Box 203043
Harrisburg, PA 17120-3043

Re: Request to Urgently Extend Pennsylvania's Disaster Declaration

Dear Speaker Cutler, President Pro Tempore Corman, and Leaders Benninghoff, McClinton, Ward, and Costa:

As you know, on August 4th, Governor Wolf signed a renewal of his Opioid Disaster Declaration. Due to recent changes to the Pennsylvania Constitution, the General Assembly must act within 21 days to extend this declaration. **We write to ask that you urgently call the General Assembly back into session by August 26th to extend this life-saving declaration.**

First established in 2018—after a tragic record of 5,403 Pennsylvanians died from opioids in 2017—the disaster declaration has given our Commonwealth additional tools to combat the scourge of addiction, including:

- ensuring access to high-quality substance use disorder treatment and supports;
- overhauling the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP);
- instituting opioid prescription limits;
- safe ways to dispose unnecessary prescription drugs;
- increasing access to medication assisted treatment;
- assist in the distribution of naloxone; and
- set up the interagency Opioid Command Center.

And these measures made lifesaving differences. Pennsylvania saw a nearly 20% decrease in opioid deaths between 2017 and 2020 through the efforts enabled by the disaster declaration, combined with the help of health professionals, community leaders, activists, and many more.

Tragically, we have seen the global COVID-19 Pandemic hamper progress. Nationwide, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported 93,331 drug overdose deaths in 2020 and a 26% increase in opioid deaths in 2020. Pennsylvania alone saw 5,063 drug overdose deaths reported for 2020 through July 21, 2021.

Isolation has contributed to the rise in addiction and overdose deaths – from support networks, mental and physical trauma, and economic hardships due to the pandemic contributing to the rise in addiction. Sadly, these triggering factors will linger among those suffering from substance abuse disorder well beyond the pandemic.

Now is *not* the time to abandon this vulnerable population – to do so will have tragic and deadly consequences.

The General Assembly pushed forward legislation to amend the state constitution, giving itself the sole authority to extend disaster declarations beyond 21 days; therefore, you have been given the authority, the duty, and the responsibility to your constituents to protect them.

Thus, we urge you to immediately call the General Assembly back into session by August 26th to extend this life-saving declaration—because we know that the epidemic of addiction will plague our community long past three weeks. Allowing the programs and efforts set up through the emergency declaration expire is not a workable option.

The faces of addiction are our friends, neighbors, and family members, people of all ages, races, income and education levels, and backgrounds. This disease plagues every community, and it will take a concerted commitment from all elected leaders and community members to turn the tide, to save lives, and to heal.

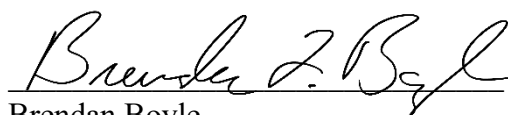
Extending the emergency declaration beyond August 26th is just the first step in continuing to stem the tide of our opioid and substance use epidemic. I look forward to continuing to work with all of you on legislative efforts at the federal and state level to increase access to treatment, remove barriers to recovery, and end stigma around addiction.

We must address this public health crisis for Pennsylvania and kindly request a response on your decision to call members back into session. We appreciate your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,



Madeleine Dean
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



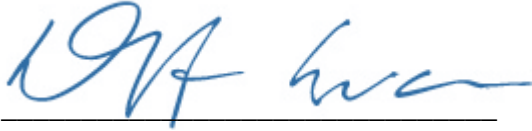
Brendan Boyle
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Matt Cartwright
MEMBER OF CONGRESS




Mike Doyle
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Dwight Evans
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



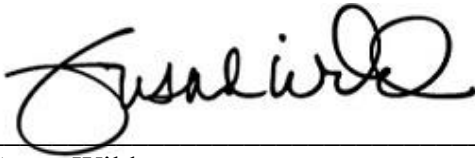
Chrissy Houlahan
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Conor Lamb
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Mary Gay Scanlon
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Susan Wild
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

CC:

Governor Tom Wolf
Office of the Governor
508 Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120