



COLLEGE of AMERICAN PATHOLOGISTS

January 10, 2018

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Commerce, Justice, Science and Related
Agencies
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related
Agencies
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Cochran, Vice Chairman Leahy, Chairman Shelby and Ranking Member Shaheen:

On behalf of the College of American Pathologists (CAP), I am writing to ask that you fund the Paul Coverdell National Forensic Science Grant at the Senate level of \$13.5 million in the omnibus bill, and that you appropriate money to provide grants to reimburse state, local, and forensic science laboratories and medical examiner and coroner offices to help address backlogs of untested samples of heroin, fentanyl, and associated synthetic drugs and to conduct autopsies and toxicology testing related to suspected drug overdose deaths from these drugs as a result of the opioid crisis.

As drug overdose deaths in America have reached crisis proportions, the federal government has responded with prevention, interdiction, and treatment, but has not addressed the forensic element of the prevention or law enforcement aspect of the crisis. In particular, the forensic science community is being forced to absorb the massive increase of cases that are now overwhelming the nation's federal, state, and local medical examiners and crime labs. The issue of how to equip the forensic community to respond is quite complex and requires more than just funding.

Forensic pathologists should investigate and autopsy every single drug overdose death and certify the cause of death. Currently, pathologists are unable to autopsy every death case because the caseload far exceeds the capacity of their offices. Much of the toxicology work that these offices rely on to make a death determination is either not being performed at all or is not being performed in a timely manner. When medical examiner and coroner offices cannot perform a full analysis of the body and body fluids, the CDC is not able to analyze the powerful data on drug overdoses, on which the federal government relies to monitor the problem and determine the appropriate response.



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As stewards of clinical laboratories, pathologists play a critical role in combating the ongoing opioid crisis. Pathologists provide oversight and direction in the appropriate use of laboratory tests to detect and monitor the use of opioids and their ever-proliferating synthetic knock-offs.

Additionally, pathologists advise on clinical test selection to battle the many downstream effects of opioid use, including HIV and Hepatitis C infection, as well as detecting and treating organ damage (e.g. liver, heart, kidney, lung) and other effects such as bleeding (coagulation/transfusions). Finally, pathologists serve in a unique role as medical examiners documenting the spread of these sequelae through society.

The Paul Coverdell National Forensic Science Grant provides 90% of funding for disciplines within the crime lab community at the state and local level, including medical examiner and coroner offices. As you are well aware, the opioid crisis has overwhelmed the forensic science community. There is a severe shortage of forensic pathologists, who are now overwhelmed by drug overdose cases. State and local governments have not been able to keep up with this crushing burden.

For these reasons, the CAP asks that you fully fund the Paul Coverdell Act at the Senate level of \$13.5 million and appropriate money to reimburse state, local, and forensic science laboratories and medical examiner and coroner offices. Please contact Darren Fenwick, Assistant Director of Legislation and Political Action, at 202-354-7135 or via email at dfenwic@cap.org should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Joe Saad, MD, FCAP

Chair, Federal State Affairs Committee

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