

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 19, 2023

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden:

As you consider the critical funding needs of our Nation, we urge you to prioritize additional funding, resources, and innovative strategies to strengthen the security of our southwest border and address the multiple, overlapping challenges there. We have long supported increasing funding for comprehensive measures to enhance border enforcement, management, and security. The situation at our border is complex, and it will take continued leadership and funding to stem the flow of illicit drugs like fentanyl, smuggling, and transnational criminal organizations that operate along our border.

Overdose deaths, particularly among young people, are increasing across our Nation. In total, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated that more than 112,000 people died from a drug overdose between May 2022 and May 2023, with fentanyl and other synthetic opioids causing the vast majority of overdoses.¹ Furthermore, according to a new analysis reported in September 2023, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Wisconsin, Arizona, Nevada, and Virginia were among the 37 states in which accidental drug overdoses were the largest cause of death for people under 40-years-old in 2022.² In Montana, accidental overdoses of young people under 40 increased by 121% from 2018 to 2022.³

The increasing rates of overdose deaths are clearly being driven, in part, by fentanyl trafficking across our border. From FY 2019 to FY 2022, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) seizures of fentanyl nearly tripled. So far in FY 2023, CBP has already seized over 25,000 pounds of fentanyl.⁴ In March, it was reported that CBP seized more than 21 million fentanyl tablets in the Nogales, AZ port of entry over the prior five months—more than the number of tablets seized during the entire previous year.⁵ Highlighting the complex situation that CBP must navigate when seizing fentanyl, officials have indicated that individuals are smuggling pills inside seat cushions, car batteries, metal walkers, and even hollowed-out bicycle frames.⁶ Furthermore, CBP data has shown that drugs are overwhelmingly being smuggled through U.S. ports of entry—particularly in Arizona and California⁷—and we must do more to ensure that our CBP Officers have the funding, tools, and technology necessary to be able to stop this surge of fentanyl into our country.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm>

² <https://www.penncapital-star.com/health-care/death-rates-for-people-under-40-have-skyrocketed-blame-fentanyl/>

³ *Id.*

⁴ <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/drug-seizure-statistics>

⁵ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2023/03/09/united-states-arizona-border-fentanyl/>

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

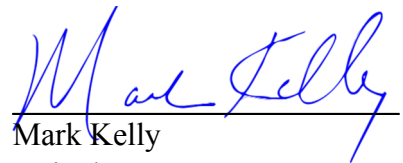
Strengthening our southwest border is not only vital to our national security, but also our public health. To achieve this, we must prioritize additional funding for the Department of Homeland Security for its critical border security operations, including funding construction and infrastructure improvements at our ports of entry. We also urge you to invest funding to hire additional CBP Officers, increase processing and screening capacity at ports of entry along the border, engage in a wide range of counter-drug activities, and acquire additional non-intrusive inspection technology to substantially increase the number of passenger cars and cargo that are scanned at the border. This border security technology will provide CBP Officers with more tools to support their mission and more frequently interdict fentanyl and other illicit drugs. These types of technology and resources will provide CBP with enhanced capabilities to detect the transport of illicit drugs, contraband, invasive species, and other dangers in inbound and outbound cargo at ports of entry.

For years, we have voted to enact additional funding to address the complex challenges at our southwest border by focusing on smart security measures and enhanced technology. We continue to support strong investments in border security measures that will keep our Nation safer and increase the capacity, personnel, and technology that are available to enhance the security of our border. Thank you for your attention to our request and these critical funding needs.

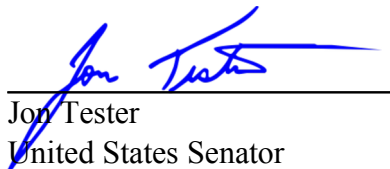
Sincerely,



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



Mark Kelly
United States Senator



Jon Tester
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



Jacky Rosen
United States Senator



Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator



Mark R. Warner
United States Senator