

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

The Honorable Robert Kennedy, Jr.  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue SW  
Washington, DC 20201

May 5, 2025

Dear Secretary Kennedy,

Thank you for renewing the public health emergency declaration to address our nation's opioid crisis. As you know, overdose deaths continue to be the leading cause of death for Americans aged 18-44, so I hope we can work together to address this crisis head on.<sup>1</sup> I have serious concern regarding the recent reports of your intent to eliminate the Overdose Prevention program and the First Responder Training program under the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) in your FY26 budget request.<sup>2</sup> As you know, both of these programs expand access to the life-saving drug, naloxone.

I have seen first-hand the impact of the opioid crisis in my fight to save my mom's life from a 30-year long struggle with addiction. When I was just six years old, my mom sustained a back injury and was over-prescribed opioids to manage her pain. Like so many Americans, this fueled a decades long addiction that eventually led to her using heroin and fentanyl. In one year alone, my mom overdosed more than 20 times and even overdosed 3 times in a single day. But she is one of the lucky ones. Time and time again, she was administered naloxone, and eventually, she was finally able to receive the treatment she needed.

This past August, my mom celebrated her seventh year in recovery, and I couldn't be prouder of her. She serves as a powerful example of what is possible when people gain access to the treatment and services they need. But the truth is, my mom wouldn't be here if there hadn't been naloxone on site each time she overdosed. Naloxone saves lives and it saved hers. There are many different paths to recovery, and I appreciate your openness in sharing your own struggle with addiction. I hope together we can work to reduce the stigma around addiction and encourage more people to find their own path to recovery.

That is why it is imperative that the Overdose Prevention and the First Responder programs continue under SAMHSA. Both of these programs expand access to naloxone and have helped curb the opioid epidemic. For the first time since 2018, the number of Americans dying of a drug

---

<sup>1</sup> ["CDC Reports Nearly 24% Decline in U.S. Drug Overdose Deaths," 2025, CDC.](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Edwards, Jonathan and Belleware, Kim. "Trump Administration praised 'life -saving naloxone, then proposed cuts," 2025, The Washington Post](#)

overdose declined over a one-year period. From October 2023 to September 2024, overdose deaths were reduced by 24%, from 114,000 deaths to 87,000 deaths.<sup>3</sup> However, the substance use disorder crisis is far from over, and American lives are at stake. We cannot afford to turn back the clock on the progress that SAMHSA has made.

As an individual in recovery yourself, I trust that you are as committed as I am to addressing the opioid crisis head on. I respectfully request a meeting or call with you so we can discuss how to best help people survive this epidemic and get into recovery.

Additionally, I would also like to invite you to Colorado's Seventh Congressional District to meet with local law enforcement, who administer naloxone every day to save lives. We must continue to support first-responders who are the front lines of the addiction crisis and this would be an opportunity for us both to listen and learn from law enforcement.

Together, we have the power to build on the progress we've made to curb the opioid epidemic and save American lives, and I look forward to working with you

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Brittany Pettersen", written over a horizontal line.

Brittany Pettersen

Member of Congress

---

<sup>3</sup> [Ibib, 2025, CDC](#).