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HEALTH  
SOCIAL SECURITY

# Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-0916

April 26, 2017

The Honorable Rick Scott  
Governor  
State of Florida  
The Capitol  
400 S. Monroe St.  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001

Dear Governor Scott,

With my support, Congress passed the *21<sup>st</sup> Century Cures Act* in 2016 to help address the opioid crisis. As a result of this legislation, Florida was awarded approximately \$27 million in federal grants last week to help communities fund treatment and prevention programs. I want to make sure that this funding goes where it's needed most – Florida's Suncoast. My district is suffering and this money will help save lives.

As the opioid epidemic has gripped our state, families across Florida have watched their loved ones struggle with addiction. Tragically, more than 3,200 Floridians lost their lives due to these drugs in 2015 alone. This crisis requires an immediate and comprehensive solution.

My congressional district deserves special consideration for extra money because it includes Manatee and Sarasota counties, which saw the first- and second-highest number of fentanyl-related deaths per capita in the state in 2015. Fentanyl, also known as synthetic heroin, killed more Floridians than heroin in 2015, according to the Florida Medical Examiners Commission. Fentanyl, which is 50 times more powerful than heroin, was responsible for 911 deaths compared to 779 killed by a heroin overdose.

I also represent part of Hillsborough County, which accounted for 12 percent of all babies born addicted to opioids in Florida in 2015.

In Manatee County, the local morgue was filled to capacity this past summer and the county was forced to store bodies at other facilities due to the spike in heroin-related deaths.

Grim statistics show the depth of the area's drug problems. According to the Florida Medical Examiners Commission:

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Suite 305  
Bradenton, FL 34205  
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- Manatee County had the highest number of cocaine deaths per capita in 2015 and 2014 of all 67 counties.
- Manatee had the highest number of Florida morphine deaths per capita in 2015 and 2014.
- Manatee had the highest number of Florida heroin deaths per capita in the state in 2015 and 2014.
- Manatee and Sarasota counties had the highest and second-highest number of fentanyl-related deaths per capita in the state in 2015.
- Manatee had the highest number of fentanyl-related deaths per capita in the state in 2014.

Our communities are coming together to combat this crisis. For example, an outpatient center in Bradenton participates in a statewide program that combines medication-assisted treatment and counseling services to prevent cravings. More than 1,400 people have been helped by this program. But additional funding could allow this program – and other innovative approaches – to help even more people in their struggle with addiction.

It's clear that the opioid epidemic has had a terrible impact on Manatee, Sarasota and Hillsborough counties. As you distribute these funds, I urge you to focus on helping communities that have borne the brunt of this crisis.

Sincerely,



Vern Buchanan  
Member of Congress

CC: Ms. Ute Gazioch  
Director of Substance Abuse and Mental Health  
Florida Department of Children and Families