

**NOMINATIONS OF DAWN O'CONNELL  
AND MIRIAM DELPHIN-RITTMON**

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**HEARING**  
OF THE  
**COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION,  
LABOR, AND PENSIONS**  
**UNITED STATES SENATE**  
**ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS**

FIRST SESSION

ON

EXAMINING THE NOMINATIONS OF DAWN MYERS O'CONNELL, OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, TO BE ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE, WHO WAS INTRODUCED BY SENATOR MURRAY, AND MIRIAM E. DELPHIN-RITTMON, OF CONNECTICUT, TO BE ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE USE, WHO WAS INTRODUCED BY SENATOR BLUMENTHAL, BOTH OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

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JUNE 8, 2021  
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## NOMINATIONS OF DAWN O'CONNELL AND MIRIAM DELPHIN-RITTMON

Tuesday, June 8, 2021

U.S. SENATE,  
COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR, AND PENSIONS,  
*Washington, DC.*

The Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:04 a.m., in room SD-430, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Patty Murray, Chair of the Committee, presiding.

Present: Senators Murray [presiding], Baldwin, Murphy, Hassan, Smith, Rosen, Lujan, Hickenlooper, Burr, Collins, Cassidy, Murkowski, Braun, and Marshall.

### OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR MURRAY

The CHAIR. Good morning. The Senate Help, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee will please come to order. Today we are holding a hearing on Dawn O'Connell to serve as Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response, and Dr. Miriam Delphin-Rittmon to serve as Assistant Secretary for Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Abuse. Ranking Member Burr and I will each have an opening statement and then I will introduce Ms. O'Connell. Senator Blumenthal is here today. Welcome. He will be introducing Dr. Delphin-Rittmon.

After the witnesses give their testimony, Senators will each have 5 minutes for a round of questions. And as I told you all before the break, with the change in guidance from the office of the Attending Physician, this Committee is now returning to hearings that look and operate more closely to how they did before the pandemic. And while that means that we have Senators fully in the room and seated closer together, we will also still be providing accommodations for those who require additional safety measures.

Additionally, while we remain unable to have the hearing fully open to the public or media for in-person attendance, live video is still available for—on our Committee website at [help.senate.gov](https://help.senate.gov). And if anyone needs accommodations, including closed captioning, you can just reach out to the Committee at the Office of Congressional Accessibility Services. We received Ms. O'Connell's formal nomination on March 25th, her office of Government Ethics paperwork, including her public financial disclosures and ethics agreement on March 31st, and her Committee paperwork on April 4th.

We received Dr. Delphin-Rittmon's formal nomination on April 27th and her Office of Government Ethics paperwork on May 4th, her Committee paperwork on May 17th. I want to thank all of our

witnesses for joining us, and I would like to welcome Ms. O'Connell's husband, Ben, and their two daughters who are here today, and Dr. Delphin-Rittmon's husband, Patrick. Welcome to all of you. The Office of Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response, ASPR, and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, SAMHSA, do critical lifesaving work. ASPR is charged with protecting families across the country from health security threats like natural disasters, chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear agents and pandemics.

Meanwhile, SAMHSA leads efforts to advance behavioral health and reduce the impact of substance use disorders and mental illness. These have always been critical missions, but the COVID-19 pandemic has put both ASPR and SAMHSA in the spotlight, and their work has now been more critical than ever. ASPR has been on the front lines of this crisis, facing challenges like how to manage and replenish the strategic national stockpile, which provides critical resources to states for needs like personal protective equipment and materials needs for testing, treatment, and vaccination. ASPR also oversees BARDA, the Biomedical Advance Research and Development Authority.

Over the past year, Congress provided BARDA funding through our COVID relief bills to purchase vaccines and work with Federal and private industry partners to develop lifesaving medical countermeasures such as diagnostic tests, therapeutics, and of course, safe, effective vaccines. As we have seen throughout this pandemic, ASPR's work can directly affect the health and safety of American families and workers. It impacts whether communities are able to do adequate testing to prevent and respond to outbreaks, whether hospitals have equipment to treat people safely, and whether people across the country are able to get safe, effective vaccines.

While SAMHSA was already tackling its own set of challenges before this pandemic struck, including an opioid epidemic that has ravaged communities and a suicide rate that has climbed for several years, COVID-19 has seen these crises become even worse. Half of adults in our Country say the stress and worry of this pandemic has impacted their mental well-being. Hospitals in my state, from Seattle to Spokane to Tacoma, have reported higher rates of mental health emergencies for youth. And last year we saw a record number of deaths from substance use disorders. Given the critical work both ASPR and SAMHSA have ahead, we must make sure each agency has a strong, experienced leader, which is why I am looking forward to hearing from today's nominees, both of whom are well qualified for their roles.

As a member of HHS leadership during the Obama administration, Ms. O'Connell managed the Department's response to past public health emergencies like Zika and Ebola. And before returning to the Department under President Biden as Senior Counselor to the Secretary for the COVID-19 response, she was Director of the U.S. Office of the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, a global partnership that works to accelerate vaccine development, ensure equitable access, and jumpstart research to prevent future epidemics.

Meanwhile, Dr. Delphin-Rittmon has served as the Commissioner of Connecticut's Department of Mental Health and Addiction

Services since 2015. She also previously served as a Senior Adviser at SAMHSA, the agency that she is now nominated to lead. Before her time at SAMHSA, she spent over a decade at Connecticut's Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, where she has served as Director of the Office of Multicultural Health Equity, Senior Policy Adviser, and Deputy Commissioner. And while today we are considering two nominees to help lead us forward through the end of this crisis, we absolutely must look back, examine our failures and successes in managing this pandemic, and make sure we improve our Nation's public health and preparedness infrastructure, so we are better prepared to handle the next public health crisis.

I look forward to having hearings in the months ahead as Senator Burr and I work to craft bipartisan legislation related to that effort. We must look at how we ensure our public health and medical systems have sufficient capacity to provide services to those most at risk, improve and secure the supply chain for critical medical supplies, tackle the health disparities that impact so many of our communities, and strengthen the Nation's public health infrastructure and medical preparedness and response programs at every level.

Now, before I turn it over to Ranking Member Burr for his opening remarks, I seek unanimous consent to put in the record 10 letters in support of Ms. O'Connell's nomination and 15 letters in support of Dr. Delphin-Rittmon's nomination. So ordered.

[The following information can be found on page 39]

The CHAIR. Senator Burr.

#### OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR BURR

Senator BURR. Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you for holding such an important hearing today. Dr. Rittmon, welcome, and Ms. O'Connell, welcome. And I welcome both of your families that are here today. Both of you are signing up for roles that will come with an unprecedented demand.

Federal service at this level always requires a significant commitment of time and energy. But the pandemic has changed the responsibilities of these roles. You will both be in the thick of policy decisions to help Americans heal from a year of loss and lockdowns and make us better prepared for future public health emergencies. Strong, effective leadership is crucial for both of these roles, and is the attribute I value the most in my considerations. I plan to spend a majority of my time this morning speaking about the role of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response, which I commonly referred to as ASPR.

Before I do, I want to take a few minutes to discuss the difficult task at hand for the Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use, who will lead SAMHSA. Doctor, the past year has been extremely trying on the American people. Many have experienced loss of unprecedented levels, the loss of loved ones, the loss of being able to hug a family and friends, the loss of jobs and school and routine. Children are increasingly having stress and anxiety, and doctors and nurses are seeing more children showing up at the hospitals with serious mental health conditions. Later this week,

the Committee will be marking up the reauthorization of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act to respond to the crisis of child abuse that has grown more acute due to the closure of schools during the pandemic.

Alongside these challenges, we are in danger of losing ground on all of the progress that we have made in the fight against the opioid crisis. Should you be confirmed, you will go from serving 3.6 million people in Connecticut to 332 million in America. You have an opportunity to bring access to this type of care to more Americans. Don't return to the status quo. Let me say it again, don't return to the status quo. Embrace the technologies that can better serve Americans in need as we recover from COVID-19. Use your experience at the state level to empower state and local leaders to design programs and solutions that best fit their communities' needs. Ms. O'Connell, welcome.

Candidly, I wish that this hearing had been held months ago. This Administration had an Acting ASPR since January 20th in the middle of a response to a pandemic. The statutory lead on public health emergencies was left open during the most significant public health emergency of our lifetime. ASPR should have been one of the first slots filled by this Administration. I will also point out to my colleagues that there is another absolutely critical public health position that has not yet been named, the FDA Commissioner. I have the greatest respect for Janet Woodcock. She is leading the FDA ably, and I think she has all the qualifications needed for this moment, but we need a fully confirmed person in that role in FDA.

We need a nominee, and I look forward to vetting her in this Committee as soon as possible. And Ms. O'Connell, in our previous conversations, we talked about the reason we wrote the ASPR into the statute. It was to answer the simple question of who is in charge during a public health emergency. The statute is extremely clear. The ASPR is in charge and serves as the Principal Adviser to the Secretary on all these matters. This is not a political or personal choice for any administration. It is the law. It is a role that we envisioned with two types of responsibilities. First, the ASPR serves an operational role.

During an emergency, the ASPR coordinates the public health and medical response, whether that threat is a hurricane, a novel virus, or chemical attack. Another part of the day job is the assessment of and investment in our medical countermeasure enterprise. As the head of the Public Health Emergency Medical Countermeasures Enterprise, or FEMSA, and with oversight of BARDA and the Strategic National Stockpile, this job covers the research, development, procurement, and deployment of these lifesaving products. Second, the ASPR is a policy job, assessing the threat landscape and adjusting our strategies to best position the United States for threats we face today and more importantly, in the future.

My questions today are designed to make sure that you are a good candidate for the entirety of the role as developed and envisioned by this Committee. With each iteration of the Pandemic and All Hazard Preparedness Act, or PAHPA for short, we have adjusted our emergency preparedness and response framework, in-



cluding the role of ASPR. During the last reauthorization, we more closely tied the position to the intelligence community, providing the ASPR with greater line of sight into the ever changing landscape of the threats that we face. We made ASPR the head of FEMSA, to coordinate and make decisions on medical countermeasure investments, and we updated the ASPR's job description to ensure a focus on both the operational and policy roles.

ASPR's responsibilities also now include the stockpile, a move that strengthens, I think, the operational side of the job. With the ASPR over the stockpile, he or she can follow taxpayer investments from the advanced research at BARDA, all the way through the last mile of deployment during an emergency. Yet the office of ASPR has also been utilized in ways that are outside of its scope. This distracts the ASPR from its mission and ultimately makes us less prepared. When we wrote the first PAHPA legislation, we hoped that we would never have to use it, and it came into needing COVID.

A lot of the framework that this Committee designed worked extremely well during the pandemic. We have three authorized vaccines with more on the way, dramatically changing the trajectory of our response to COVID for the better. But the response was not perfect, and the work is not done. Instead of looking to the ASPR, the last administration created its own leadership structure for the COVID response, building the plane and flying it at the same time.

Congress intentionally created ASPR to avoid this confusion and to be the tip of the spear during a response. I know who was supposed to be in charge because I helped write the law putting ASPR in charge. So our Committee looks at what improvements need to be made in the law. I hope that if you are confirmed, you and my colleagues will work with me to see what mistakes were made and how to learn from them, to make it more clear that ASPR is, in fact, in charge and that we have the tool—and that you have the tools you need, and that when the next pandemic comes, because it likely will, the ASPR is ready to stand up and take the lead.

The American people expect us to do all we can to protect them from a public health threat and to communicate those actions to them as clearly as possible. They deserve an ASPR that can command the response and coordinate their colleagues across HHS. And that brings the same urgency and vigilance to the role in peacetime as in the middle of a response. I look forward to our conversation today and hearing whether you are ready to risk—to rise to the challenge before you. I thank the Chair.

The CHAIR. Thank you, Senator Burr. We will now introduce today's witnesses. Dawn O'Connell is an expert in public health, emergency preparedness and response efforts, and currently Senior Adviser for the COVID-19 response at the Department of Health and Human Services. Before she was named to that position earlier this year, she spent several years as the U.S. Office Director at the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, or CEPI, an organization focused on global preparedness for disease outbreaks.

CEPI is a collaborative effort with public, private and civil society partners from around the world. It works to accelerate vaccine development, ensure equitable access, create stockpiles against epidemics before they start, invest in technology to speed up vac-

cine development for new diseases, and coordinate Governmental responses and capacity in places that need additional support. Ms. O'Connell's leadership to help CEPI quickly become a key player in developing vaccines against emerging infectious diseases like COVID. CEPI was a founding member of the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator, a program that developed alongside the World Health Organization to ensure vaccines were developed and distributed equitably.

O'Connell worked with others at CEPI to convene an international group of stakeholders focused on speeding up the purchase, production, and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines. But long before this pandemic and her time at CEPI, O'Connell was already focused on global health security.

As a Senior HHS staffer in the Obama administration, she managed the Department's response to Zika, oversaw the response to Ebola, and coordinated efforts with state, Federal, and international partners, and lead HHS' work with the White House's National Security staff, World Health Organization, and partner countries to develop and launch President Obama's global health security agenda.

Prior to her time in the Obama administration, she worked for Congressman John Spratt of South Carolina in a number of roles, including 4 years as his chief of staff. O'Connell received her B.A. from Vanderbilt University and her JD from Tulane University Law School. She currently lives in Washington, DC. with her husband and two daughters who are again here with her today. Ms. O'Connell, I am delighted to welcome you and your family.

Thank you for joining us. And I look forward to hearing from you today and working with you in the future. And with that, I will turn it over to Senator Blumenthal to introduce Dr. Delphin-Rittmon.

Senator Blumenthal.

#### STATEMENT OF SENATOR BLUMENTHAL

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you, Chair Murray, Ranking Member Burr, Members of the Committee. I am really so proud to be here today. It is bittersweet because for all the reasons that Commissioner Delphin-Rittmon will be a great Assistant Secretary, we will miss her in Connecticut. And I was last here to introduce Dr. Miguel Cardona, the nominee for Secretary of Education.

I almost want to say to President Biden, quit taking some of our best people because Commissioner Delphin-Rittmon is one of the most valued and dedicated public servants in the State of Connecticut. And I want to speak personally because I have come to know and admire her personally. She is someone who shows up and she wears well. She may not be the splashiest person when you first get to know her, but the more you know her, the more you admire and respect and like her as a human being of tremendous training and professional expertise, but also someone who leads by example, leads with her heart as well as her head.

Talking about showing up, I have seen her at countless community forums and meetings with public officials, professional experts, but also recovering addicts and their families, and she is someone who knows how to communicate to raise awareness and support.

If there is a person in treatment, a person seeking treatment, a person in recovery, a person who needs someone to help them through the insidious disease of addiction, Dr. Delphin-Rittmon is there. And as Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Abuse, she will be there for the Nation, as she has been for the people of Connecticut. She knows that solving the problem of opioid and mental health crises in our Country, we must meet people where they are at themselves.

When she heard from the community about barriers to care, she deployed a mobile medication treatment program to high need areas. When she heard that people were struggling to access care, she implemented a 24/7, toll free access line to help people find access. And through transportation assistance, she literally got to care for them in the way that they needed. She has been the right person at the right moment for Connecticut, and I think she is the right person for this job for our entire nation. She has a background as a clinical community psychologist and public servant who has dedicated her life to helping people who suffer from the disease.

She, more than anyone, recognizes that addiction is a disease, not a moral failing, and mental illness, which as I think everybody on this Committee recognizes, is a problem that we have failed to give sufficient importance to treating. And I know that she will be a continuing advocate for mental health parity, which I have fought to recognize, and I know Members of this Committee like Chair Murray and Senator Casey and others, Senator Baldwin, have as well. So I strongly recommend her to this Committee.

There is no sugarcoating the problems that she has to address. They are Herculean, and they will require a commitment from the Nation and from this President, which I know will be forthcoming, as well as from us in the U.S. Senate. And I am very, very grateful for the opportunity to introduce her and her husband, Patrick, to this Committee. Thank you very much.

The CHAIR. Thank you, Senator Blumenthal. Appreciate that introduction. Welcome to you, Dr. Delphin-Rittmon. And with that, we will begin our testimony today. And Ms. O'Connell, we will begin with you.

**STATEMENT OF DAWN O'CONNELL TO BE ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE, WASHINGTON, DC**

Ms. O'Connell. Chair Murray, Ranking Member Burr, Members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today as you consider my nomination for the position of Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Chair Murray, thank you for the kind words of introduction. I must also thank President Biden for nominating me to this important role, and of course, thank my family, my husband Ben and daughters Maddie and Franny whose love, support, and senses of humor sustained me through late nights and long hours of work.

I am honored also to be on the same panel today with Dr. Miriam Delphin-Rittmon, the President's SAMHSA nominee. I was called to public service early in life, influenced by the example set

by my parents, an educator and social worker. This vocation was further strengthened as a young staffer on the Hill, witnessing the tragic events of September 11th. On that day, I was evacuated from my office in the Longworth Building and stood with colleagues just a few blocks from the Capitol watching in horror on a portable television as the Twin Towers fell.

A few weeks later, our office was evacuated again, this time for several weeks while it was secured following the deadly anthrax letters sent to Congress. And then in 2005, my family with deep New Orleans roots was impacted by Hurricane Katrina. Several of my aunts and cousins were forced to leave their homes and a great aunt was among those evacuated from a nursing home that was unable to maintain power and safe conditions. It took our family several days to find her with fellow residents on a tarmac in Memphis. Grateful to the responders that got her there unharmed. These events ingrained in me the importance of a strong emergency response system.

They also led to the formation of the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response, the role for which I am being considered today. I took these lessons with me to HHS during the Obama administration, where I served as Deputy Chief of Staff to both Secretary Sebelius and Burwell. In that role, I helped lead the responses to several public health emergencies, including the Ebola and Zika outbreaks, and hone their skills necessary to manage complex crises.

This experience, coupled with nearly 4 years working for the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, an international nonprofit whose mission is to accelerate the development of vaccines to prevent epidemics, uniquely qualified me to come back to HHS to serve as Secretary Becerra's Senior Counselor for COVID-19. As part of the Administration's current COVID response effort, I have seen how critically important the mission of ASPR is at this pivotal and unprecedented time. I have also witnessed the dedication and commitment of the ASPR team. If confirmed for this role and entrusted to lead this team, my priorities would be threefold.

First, to deliver us quickly out of the current pandemic by continuing ASPR's work of accelerating the development and distribution of vaccines and therapeutics, and securing and distributing necessary PPE. Second, to restore and maintain the public health emergency capacity that has been severely strained by the pandemic, including replenishing the strategic national stockpile. Third, to begin preparing for the next public health emergency, whether natural or manmade, by keeping vigilant watch of the horizon, scanning for what may come next.

If confirmed, I commit to working against each of these priorities in a transparent and accountable manner, and to always let the science lead. I also commit to working as a partner with this Committee. Public health preparedness and response is neither a Republican issue nor a Democratic issue, it is an American issue. If confirmed, I will work with each of you to ensure that the communities you represent have the tools needed to prepare for the next public health emergency.

Finally, I pledge to do everything in my power to address the serious challenges ahead of us as we navigate threats that endanger

Americans, our health and national security, both present and future. I am prepared for the task ahead and honored to be nominated to serve as the ASPR. Thank you for considering my nomination and I look forward to answering your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. O'Connell follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF DAWN O'CONNELL

Chair Murray, Ranking Member Burr, Members of the Committee—I am honored to appear before you today as you consider my nomination for the position of Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Chair Murray, thank you for the kind words of introduction.

I must also thank President Biden for nominating me to this important role and of course my family: my husband Ben and daughters Maddie and Frannie whose love, support and senses of humor sustain me through late nights and long hours of work.

I am honored to be on the same panel today with Dr. Miriam Delphin-Rittmon, the President's SAMHSA nominee.

I was called to public service early in life influenced by the example set by my parents: an educator and a social worker. This vocation was further strengthened as a young staffer on the Hill witnessing the tragic events of September 11, 2001.

On that day, I was evacuated from my office in the Longworth Building and stood with colleagues just a few blocks from the United States Capitol—watching in horror on a portable television as the Twin Towers fell. A few weeks later, our office was evacuated again—this time for several weeks—while it was secured following the deadly anthrax letters sent to Congress.

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These events ingrained in me the importance of a strong emergency response system. They also led to the formation of the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR). The role for which I'm being considered today.

I took these lessons with me to HHS during the Obama administration where I served as Deputy Chief of Staff to both Secretaries Sebelius and Burwell. In that role, I helped lead the responses to several public health emergencies—including the Ebola and Zika outbreaks—and honed the skills necessary to manage complex crises.

This experience coupled with nearly 4 years working for the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations—an international non-profit whose mission is to accelerate the development of vaccines to prevent epidemics—uniquely qualified me to come back to HHS to serve as Secretary Becerra's Senior Counselor for COVID-19.

As part of the Administration's current COVID-19 response effort, I have seen how critically important the mission of ASPR is at this pivotal and unprecedented time. I have also witnessed the dedication and commitment of the ASPR team.

If confirmed for this role and entrusted to lead this team, my priorities would be threefold:

First, to deliver us quickly out of the current pandemic by continuing ASPR's work of accelerating the development and distribution of vaccines and therapeutics and securing and distributing necessary personal protective equipment or PPE.

Second, to restore and maintain the public health emergency capacity that has been severely strained by the pandemic including replenishing the Strategic National Stockpile.

Third, to begin preparing for the next public health emergency whether natural or man-made by keeping vigilant watch of the horizon—scanning for what might come next.

If confirmed, I commit to working against each of these priorities in a transparent, accountable, and collaborative manner and to always let the science lead.

I also commit to working as a partner with this Committee. Public health preparedness and response is neither a Republican issue nor a Democratic issue. It is an American issue. If confirmed, I will work with each of you to ensure that the communities you represent have the tools needed to prepare for the next public health emergency.

Finally, I pledge to do everything in my power to address the serious challenges ahead of us as we navigate threats that endanger Americans, our health and national security—both present and future.

I am prepared for the task ahead and honored to be nominated to serve as the ASPR. Thank you for considering my nomination. I look forward to answering your questions.

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The CHAIR. Thank you, Ms. O’Connell. We will now turn to Dr. Delphin-Rittmon for your testimony.

**STATEMENT OF MIRIAM DELPHIN-RITTMON TO BE ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE USE, MERIDEN, CONNECTICUT**

Ms. DELPHIN-RITTMON. Thank you and good morning, Chair Murray, Ranking Member Burr, Members of the Committee. Thank you for considering my nomination to be Assistant Secretary for mental health and substance use at the U.S. Department of Mental Health and—at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. And thank you to Senator Blumenthal for his kind introduction.

I so appreciate his leadership and fierce advocacy for mental health and substance use recovery needs of the people of Connecticut and across our Nation. It is a true honor to be here today. First, I want to thank President Biden for nominating me and placing his trust in me. Here today with me is my husband, Patrick Rittmon, a 22 year veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps. I am ever grateful for his service to our Country and for his support and understanding throughout my career. I sit before you today the daughter of Haitian immigrants who came to the United States filled with the hope and optimism of America’s promise.

My father, through perseverance, long hours, and a passion for learning and helping others, became a psychiatrist who practiced for over 50 years and achieved five board certifications in the mental health field. It is with the same passion for learning and aiding others that my parents raised my three brothers and two sisters and me, emphasizing education, hard work, empathy, compassion, perseverance with faith through adversity, and cherishing the blessing of our family. These are all values that are central to who I am today and core values that influence and inform my work. Throughout my 20 year career in the behavioral health field, I have had extensive experience in direct care, academic, and Government settings.

Emphasizing recovery, addressing equity and culture and behavioral health service delivery, and system development are prominent themes in my work, largely influenced by my having received a SAMHSA minority fellowship in graduate school and my subsequent payback experiences with the Yale University Program for Recovery and Community Health in the Department of Psychiatry, where I conducted research, clinical care training, and consultation in community and State Government settings.

I am currently an Adjunct Associate Professor at Yale, having been on faculty since 2002, and I am a testament to the value of such fellowship programs growing our diverse behavioral health workforce. As commissioner of the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, a role I have held since 2015, my focus has been on recovery—on promoting recovery oriented, integrated and cultural responses services and systems that foster dignity, respect, meaningful community inclusion among the individuals that we are entrusted to serve. The President has nominated me at an inflection point in the Nation’s collective mental health. The COVID–19 pandemic has had far reaching ripple effects on aspects of our daily lives, many aspects of our daily lives, and it has taken a significant toll on mental health.

Across the country, we are seeing increased rates of anxiety, depression, and tragically, tragically overdose deaths have substantially increased as well. As we face this behavioral health challenge of our lifetime, SAMHSA finds itself with never before seen resources to address these critical issues. Where we go from here will impact a generation of American families. If confirmed, my agenda is clear. First, we must increase access to mental health and substance use services and supports to better address the behavioral health challenges that children and adults alike are experiencing as a function of this pandemic.

Second, we must enhance crisis and suicide prevention services and supports in line with the implementation of the 988 National Suicide Prevention and Crisis Hotline. This nationwide change in crisis response will allow Americans to get services and supports where they need it and when they need it. Finally, the overdose epidemic continues to ravage many communities across the country. This is not a new problem, yet it has exacerbated during COVID–19, and we see daily losses in life nationwide. If confirmed, reaching people where they are via innovative prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and recovery solutions will be a hallmark of the work of SAMHSA.

I realize that we may not always agree on the best approaches to solve these challenges, but I pledge to work closely with you to ensure that our decisions are transparent, that our team is accessible, and the SAMHSA listens to your views. Before I close, I must acknowledge the outpouring of support from across the country. I am deeply humbled and appreciative of all those who wrote letters or called or texted or helped with the letters. Thank you so much.

I see you all as vital parts of the village that it will take to address this behavioral health challenge we are facing as a Nation. Thank you for your consideration of my nomination, and I look forward to answering your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Delphin-Rittmon follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MIRIAM DELPHIN-RITTMON

Chairman Murray, Ranking Member Burr, and Members of the Committee, thank you for considering my nomination to be the Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. And thank you to Senators Blumenthal and Murphy for your kind introductions. I so appreciate your leadership and fierce advocacy for mental health and substance use treatment and recovery needs of the people of Connecticut and across our Nation.

It is a true honor to be here today. First, I want to thank President Biden for nominating me and placing his trust in me. Here with me today is my husband, Patrick Rittmon, a 22-year veteran of the United States Marine Corp. I am ever grateful for his service to our Country and for his support and understanding throughout out my career.

I sit before you today the daughter of Haitian immigrants who came to the United States filled with hope and optimism of America's promise. My father, through perseverance, long hours and a passion for learning and helping others, became a psychiatrist and practiced for over 50 years achieving 5 board certifications in the mental health field. It is with this same passion for learning and aiding others that my parents raised my three brothers, two sisters and me emphasizing education, hard work, empathy, compassion, perseverance, with faith, through adversity and cherishing the blessing of our family. These are all values that are central to who I am today and core values that influence and inform my work.

Throughout my over 20-year career in the behavioral health field, I have had extensive experience in direct client care, academic, and government settings. Emphasizing recovery and addressing equity and culture in behavioral health service delivery and system development are prominent themes in my work—largely influenced by my having received a Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Minority Fellowship in graduate school and my subsequent payback experiences with the Yale University Program for Recovery and Community Health in Department of Psychiatry, where I conducted research, provided clinical care, training and consultation in community mental health and state government settings. I am currently an Adjunct Associate Professor at Yale having been on faculty since 2002 and am a testament to the value of such fellowship programs growing our diverse behavioral health workforce.

As the Commissioner of the Connecticut State Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, a role I have held since 2015, my focus has been on promoting recovery-oriented, integrated, and culturally responsive services and systems that foster dignity, respect, and meaningful community inclusion of the individuals we are entrusted to serve.

The President has nominated me at an inflection point of this Nation's collective mental health. The COVID-19 pandemic has had far reaching ripple effects on many aspects of our daily lives and has taken a significant toll on mental health. Across the country we are seeing increased rates of anxiety and depression, and tragically overdose deaths are substantially increasing across the country.

As we face this behavioral health challenge of our lifetime, SAMHSA finds itself with never before seen resources to address these critical issues.

Where we go from here will define a generation of American families.

If confirmed, my agenda is clear—first, we must increase access to mental health and substance use services and supports to better address the behavioral health challenges adults and children alike are experiencing as a result of the pandemic.

Second, we must enhance crisis and suicide prevention services and supports in line with the implementation of the 988 national suicide prevention and crisis hotline. This nationwide change in crisis response will allow Americans in crisis to connect with support when and where they need it.

Finally, the overdose epidemic continues to ravage too many communities across the country. This is not a new problem, yet it has been exacerbated during COVID-19 and results in daily losses for communities nationwide. If confirmed, reaching people where they are via innovative prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and recovery solutions will be a hallmark of the work of SAMHSA.

I realize that we may not always agree on the best approaches to solve these challenges, but I pledge to work closely with you to ensure that our decisions are transparent, our team accessible, and that SAMHSA is listening to your views.

Before I close, I must acknowledge the outpouring of support from across the country. I am deeply humbled and appreciative of all those who wrote letters or called or email and texted—thank you so much. I see you all as vital parts of the village it will take to address the behavioral health challenges we face as a Nation.

Thank you for considering my nomination, and I look forward to answering your questions.

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The CHAIR. Thank you very much. We will now begin a round of 5 minute questions. And I ask all of my colleagues, as usual,



please keep track of the clock, stay within 5 minutes. The COVID-19 pandemic has been devastating. And in the United States, the virus has killed nearly 600,000 people and sickened more than 30 million others. It has challenged our mental health and it has pushed our frontline health care workers and our public health systems to the brink.

The burden of all those challenges has fallen disproportionately on people of color, women, people with disabilities, and those with the lowest incomes. You are now both nominated to lead offices tasked with responding to these challenges. And I want to hear what steps each of you will take to place equity at the center of that response. So if confirmed, how will you prioritize equity in the ongoing COVID-19 response and ensure it is a priority in the response to future public health crises? And I will start with Ms. O'Connell.

Ms. O'CONNELL. Chair Murray, thank you so much for that question and thank you for your leadership on these important issues. We have seen over this last year the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on communities of color and vulnerable populations. And it has really brought into focus the need to equitably distribute vaccines, therapeutics, PPE, and other tools that are necessary to fight the pandemic. The Biden administration has made equity a cornerstone of its response. It is interwoven in all of the things that it has done, including the distribution of vaccines. It has emphasized not just going fast, but also going fairly.

If I am confirmed, I will continue that work from the perspective of the ASPR in distributing PPE, vaccines, therapeutics to make sure that the tools that we have been so lucky to have developed so quickly in this pandemic are distributed equitably because in America we are not going to recover unless all Americans have access to these critical tools. And I will commit to ensuring that the tools are available to all communities.

The CHAIR. Thank you.

Dr. Delphin-Rittmon.

Ms. DELPHIN-RITTMON. Yes. Thank you, Chair Murray, for that question. We know it is so important to ensure that individuals that are accessing our services and systems, particularly diverse individuals, as well as all individuals across the country, to include individuals within rural areas, that they receive optimal care and that we are able to both identify and address any disparities that are present. Should I be confirmed, I would be very interested in, for one, looking at the data that we have. We know that SAMHSA has a good bit of data. And so a part of addressing and focusing on equity is having a good sense of what the trends and what the disparities may be. So certainly that would be a part of our work.

SAMHSA has an Office of Behavioral Health Equity and I would look forward to continuing to expand the work of that office. I also would look forward to working with the Secretary. I know this is a priority for the Administration and so I would look forward to marshaling the resources necessary to ensure that we address equity.

We know this is a challenge that we have seen in our Country prior to the pandemic. And so, as I have throughout my career, would be committed to working on this important issue to ensure

that diverse Americans, as well as Americans within rural areas, and all Americans accessing services and supports receive quality, equitable care to ensure strong health outcomes. Thank you for that question.

The CHAIR. Thank you. Ms. O'Connell, the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response oversees and coordinates the Department's response to emergencies like COVID-19, as well as managing the strategic national stockpile. We need a stockpile that can adequately address future threats such as infectious disease outbreaks like we have seen, as well as protect our frontline health care workers with the personal protective equipment they need. I wanted to ask you, if you are confirmed, how will you ensure that ASPR demonstrates both effective and responsible management of the stockpile before and during public health emergencies?

Ms. O'CONNELL. Chair Murray, thank you so much for that question. If confirmed, I expect to spend a significant amount of my time working on the strategic national stockpile. We have certainly learned a lot in this last year and a half about what it was and what it wasn't and what it needs to be. I think it is important that we diversify what is in there to make sure that it is fit for purpose for whatever the most likely public health emergencies to come will be.

I also think it is critical that we secure a domestic manufacturing base so we have a secure and resilient public health and medical supply chain that we can rely on both in peacetime and in times of need. There is going to be a lot that we need to learn coming out of this pandemic. And I look forward to working with this Committee on learning those lessons and applying those lessons to the strategic national stockpile and other places.

The CHAIR. Thank you.

Senator Burr.

Senator BURR. Thank you, Chair. Dr. Delphin-Rittmon, I believe faith is a powerful tool for helping people find community and healing. Under current law, faith based organizations are eligible to compete as grantees for SAMHSA substance use disorder programs while maintaining their religious character because of a provision known as the charitable choice. If confirmed, will you commit to upholding this law at SAMHSA?

Ms. DELPHIN-RITTMON. I appreciate that question, Senator, and again, appreciate the opportunity to appear before this Committee. Certainly within my work in Connecticut, I have seen the value of the collaborations with faith based organizations. And so, yes, I can confirm that I would commit to upholding the law related to this. I have seen significant impacts related to faith based organizations connecting people to services and supports and helping to promote long term recovery for individuals that connect to services.

Senator BURR. Thank you for that commitment. Ms. O'Connell, as I stated in my opening statement, I think the law is very clear that the ASPR is in charge. Do you agree that the law puts the ASPR in charge?

Ms. O'CONNELL. Thank you, Ranking Member Burr. I do agree.

Senator BURR. If confirmed, what would be the first three things you would do differently to make it clear that you are in charge?

Ms. O'CONNELL. Ranking Member Burr, thank you so much for that question and thank you for your career long commitment to these issues. It is an honor to be before you today, as I am being considered for the ASPR role that you helped create. I do think it is important that the ASPR is in charge. And I have to say I was surprised coming back into the Administration and into HHS in January to find the Coast Guard on behalf of FEMA, coordinating within the Department, doing the interagency and interagency coordination, a role I thought should be run by the ASPR. So I agree with you that is a critical, a critical role.

Among the things I would do would be to take the work that I have currently been doing, which is different in scope and different in mission, but has helped build relationships across the Department, and apply those relationships in the role of ASPR to help coordinate on behalf of the Department both for the ending of the COVID pandemic and any future public health emergencies that might happen.

The relationship that I currently have with the Secretary as his Senior Counselor will come into play. And I believe as ASPR, I would have the full faith of the Department behind me in the coordination of any public health emergencies.

Senator BURR. Today, the scope of BARDA is larger than when we originally created BARDA as an entity. And there are some that would like to expand that even further. And I am not asking you to weigh in on the science behind BARDA's decisions, but on ways to keep the agency focused on its mission. And how would you ensure BARDA remains focused on the serious public health threats?

Ms. O'CONNELL. BARDA is a unique agency within the Administration, and it has stepped up and risen to the challenge in this pandemic. Ranking Member Burr, it is the partner with DOD and what was called Operation Warp Speed and can share in the success of having these three vaccines developed and under authorization within 11 months.

I believe in order for BARDA to continue to strengthen this mission, it must do the work that it was intended to do, which is to accelerate and ensure that countermeasures that will keep us safe from any public health emergency are developed and maintained. And I intend to make sure that BARDA is able to do that, should I be confirmed.

Senator BURR. As you said, this is not your first rodeo in an administration. You were in the Obama administration under, I think, two Secretaries at HHS. And you said you led the response during—the response effort during Ebola. Now, you weren't ASPR then. The ASPR was actually delegated to concentrating on the hospital network in the country for Ebola patients that would come back to the U.S. What can you reflect to the Committee now, that the ASPR should have been doing at that time, and reflect what you will do?

Ms. O'CONNELL. Ranking Member Burr, thank you for that question. I can't speak to the reasons why the Secretaries organize the responses the way they do. But I do intend, should I be confirmed as the ASPR, to lead the future of public health emergencies and to be the Secretary's principal adviser on public health emergencies and response.

Senator BURR. Right. And Madam Chair, if I could just say for all Members, the question of PPE—PPE for the future, and the supply chain is probably the biggest issue that this Committee will deal with, hopefully in collaboration with the ASPR. There is not an easy answer to it because as we have learned, there is a difference between capacity and capability.

When the Federal Government is 4 percent of the PPE purchases and 96 percent is outside of the Government, it makes it very difficult to set up a supply chain that you can control and assure that there is a base to sell to with the global competition at ridiculous prices we see today. So it is going to be challenging. Thank you.

The CHAIR. Yes, it will. At this point, I am going to turn the Committee over to Senator Casey. I have to go to another Committee. I will be back shortly. And the next two speakers will be Senator Smith, Senator Cassidy, and Senator Casey will be holding the gavel until I return. Thank you.

Senator SMITH. Thank you so much. Thank you, Madam Chair and Ranking Member Burr, and it is really great to be back together in the Committee with everyone. And I want to also just welcome Ms. O'Connell and Dr. Delphin-Rittmon for your willingness to serve our Country at this most important time. So thank you so much for being with us today. Dr. Delphin-Rittmon, I would like to direct my first question to you. And this is really about the pediatric mental health crisis that I see that we are facing in this country.

The Star Tribune in my home State of Minnesota recently profiled the stories of Minnesota families who are dealing with this thing called emergency room boarding, caused by an egregious shortage of pediatric inpatient beds where families are so concerned about the health and well-being of their children that they take them to an emergency room and then there they stay because there is no place for them to go. And sometimes they are there for days. This kind of boarding, of course, is so traumatic and it aggravates symptoms of serious mental health conditions.

It leads moms like Allison Yokum, who was quoted in this story, to ask herself, am I a bad mom because I took my son to the emergency room. But these are the choices that parents face when there is no better alternative, and it is only getting worse. Of course, we know, like so many things, this was an issue before the pandemic, but the pandemic has made it—has exacerbated it. So my question to you is, what can you tell us about the risks of this kind of shortage of pediatric inpatient beds? And what should we be doing at the Federal level to address this issue and to expand access to inpatient health care for young people who have a critical need?

Ms. DELPHIN-RITTMON. Yes. Senator, I want to thank you for that question, and I also appreciate the time that we had a couple of weeks ago to speak about these and other issues. You know, this is a challenge that we are seeing across the country. We know that there is a shortage of child psychiatrists, for example, across the country. So certainly workforce is an important area to address here. We know that it is critical for children to be treated at the appropriate level of care.

Children in emergency Departments for long periods of time, that can create experience of trauma onto itself for the children, and in

some instances for the families as well. So it is an area that we really need to come together on and do some real creative thinking and innovative thinking around how to address this, particularly in terms of workforce, but also in terms of how to better meet the needs of children prior to their being in crisis and needing an emergency Department. HERSA has done a lot of work in this area.

In fact, they have recently put out a guide related to children's mental health that includes information related to assessments and triage and working with community providers and partners. And so I think that is a real valuable resource that is there. Dissemination of resources like that to hospitals I think would be extremely helpful. If I am confirmed, I would be very interested in meeting with you and working with others across Government to further explore this critical issue.

We know it is important to get children connected to care so that they can receive optimal health outcomes as well. But thank you for the question and for your work and advocacy in this area as well.

Senator SMITH. Thank you so much. I appreciate it. I am working with colleagues on a package of policy solutions to expand access to mental health care, especially for young people. One piece of this is a loan forgiveness. It would provide loan forgiveness for providers who are able to practice in shortage areas. This is a piece of legislation I am working on with Senator Murkowski. Also looking at increasing Federal Medicaid reimbursement for behavioral health. The reimbursement is often so important. And then third, increasing access to school based mental health care. You and I spoke about this. This is something I and many of my colleagues have an interest in and is a great way of reaching young people before they are in a real crisis situation.

Before I—I am going to run out of time and a minute here, I want to just briefly talk with Ms. O'Connell. The pandemic exposed our Nation's dependence on countries for the supply of our essential prescription drugs. Over 70 percent of manufacturers that supply the United States with active pharmaceutical ingredients are based overseas. We have a serious issue here.

Senator Cassidy and I are working on bipartisan legislation that would incentivize domestic manufacturing of essential antibiotic drugs to secure our medical supply chain. In the minus 3 seconds I have left, maybe if you could just comment very briefly on that need.

Ms. O'CONNELL. Senator Smith, thank you so much for your question, and I will try to be real quick just to say that I commit to working with you and Senator Cassidy on this bill. I do think this past year and a half has exposed some cracks in our medical and public health supply chains. And I look forward to trying to solve for that and incentivize more domestic manufacturing.

Senator SMITH. Thank you so much.

Senator CASEY. Thank you, Senator Smith.

Senator Cassidy.

Senator CASSIDY. Hey. Hello. Thank you both. I appreciate the call that both of you gave. And Dr. Delphin-Rittmon, thank you for your husband's service. So, thank you both. Ms. O'Connell, let me start with you, please. And this will be something we spoke about

on the phone but I still think it is worthwhile to publicly speak about. The—speaking of ASPR, and how they kind of show got shoved to the back seat in this last response to the pandemic, my appropriations guys, just kind of—just kind of pointing things out.

They don't know how to dispense billions of dollars, HHS in general and ASPR in particular. Inevitably, this is going to fall to FEMA because FEMA knows how to dispense billions of dollars. Unfortunately, FEMA doesn't have medical staff and so it is going to be not as efficient as if they did. And that was just as amusing when it started. And it turns out it was absolutely true. So it is kind of a structural problem, if you will.

How would you address that structural problem without creating a gazillion other people who are working from home during a pandemic?

Ms. O'CONNELL. Senator Cassidy, thank you so much for that question and thank you so much for the good conversation we had. And I enjoyed speaking about this particular issue. And if I am confirmed, it is one I have been reflecting on because we currently have, as I mentioned to Ranking Member Burr, BARDA is the partner with DOD right now in what was the operation—Operation Warp Speed. And what DOD has brought into the Department is extraordinary capacity when it comes to logistics, acquisitions, and contracting. And one of the first things I will be faced with, if confirmed, is figuring out how much of that capacity should be brought into the Department. And I don't—

Senator CASSIDY. Now, it does seem to be a duplication of effort because it isn't often that this is required, let's hope never again, so we don't want people just kind of twiddling thumbs, waiting for the next pandemic. Do you see where I am going with that?

Ms. O'CONNELL. Absolutely. Any capacity that we add to the Department would have to be right sized and fit for purpose. Also have a peacetime use as well as a pandemic or emergency use. So I agree with you on that. But it is something that I think the Department is having to face and think about. And I, appreciated your question about that.

Senator CASSIDY. Dr. Delphin-Rittmon, thank you again for calling, and for speaking. And obviously, one of the criticisms is what happened at the Whiting facility, if I am pronouncing that correctly, or Whiting facility in Connecticut when you were the Director overall. And so I just thought I would give you a chance publicly to speak to that, because if I am asked, I can refer to your public statement.

Ms. DELPHIN-RITTMON. Yes. Thank you again, Senator, for our conversation and for that question. The patient abuse that happened at Whiting was a tragedy and should never have happened. I take patient abuse very seriously. And so immediately working with my team called in the state police because I wanted an outside investigation in addition to our H.R. investigation. Ultimately, 37 staff were separated from state service and 10 staff—

Senator CASSIDY. Can I interrupt you for a second, because what seems critical here is, at what level were you relative to the facility? Do you follow what I am saying? Because if you are the head of a whole Department, but there is four layers between, that is

one thing. But if you are like in the office at the Whiting facility, that is the other thing. So could you elaborate on that, please?

Ms. DELPHIN-RITTMON. Yes, I appreciate that question. So as Commissioner, I have a number of state hospitals, the two state hospitals that I oversee. Whiting Forensic Hospital is one of those hospitals. At the time, it was combined with Connecticut Valley Hospital, but now it is a hospital unto itself. That was part of the system change we put in place. So there is myself as Commissioner. There was a CEO of the hospital. There was medical Director, a full leadership team of the hospital. And that was one hospital that I oversaw as part of the whole Connecticut system of care.

Senator CASSIDY. I am sorry I interrupted your answer. So continue, please.

Ms. DELPHIN-RITTMON. Yes. So, of course, the first step was ensure the safety and security of the patients there at the hospital. Then also called in the state police, wanted an immediate outside investigation. Ultimately, again, 37 staff were separated from state service, 10 were tried and convicted related to the abuse. Worked with the state legislature around having a law said that if people fail to report abuse or neglect, that is a crime.

Really worked on a specific system changes related to that. Also worked on enhancing our security and camera systems throughout the hospital. Brought in a consultant and reviewed policies, procedures, and implemented other significant system changes within the hospital. This work is ongoing. Ongoing in terms of ensuring the staff have the appropriate training, that they are aware of the policies related to reporting, and so it has been an ongoing area of work. But ultimately, my aim is to provide quality care to ensure the safety and security of the individuals that we serve and to help people move into recovery.

Senator CASSIDY. If I may summarize, you are not directly responsible, but you ultimately were, but still you were above and you got a leadership team between you and these incidences, and that subsequent to this, the corrective measures have been taken as well as the punitive for those who were concerned, correct?

Ms. DELPHIN-RITTMON. That is correct, Senator. Yes.

Senator CASSIDY. There is many other things to speak about, but I will defer to my colleagues on the—I know Chris Murphy and I have worked so closely on many of these issues, too. So I will defer to them on those other issues. But thank you both for your answers.

Ms. DELPHIN-RITTMON. Thank you, Senator.

Senator CASEY. Thank you, Senator Cassidy.

Senator Lujan.

Senator LUJAN. Thank you so much. Dr. Delphin-Rittmon, given the spike in opioid deaths last year, I very much appreciate that the Biden administration is devoting significant resources into addressing the substance use disorder crisis. In New Mexico, drug overdoses increased by 25 percent in 2020, fueled largely by the increase of the deadly synthetic opioid fentanyl. The recently released budget calls for a 63 percent increase in funding for SAMHSA, \$3.7 billion increase over last year. Should you be confirmed, how do you plan on utilizing those resources to ensure that Americans

have access to the treatments that can help curb those tragic overdoses?

Ms. DELPHIN-RITTMON. Thank you for that question, Senator. And for your advocacy on this issue. I also appreciated the conversation that we had a couple of weeks ago. I appreciated learning about your priorities in areas that we can collaborate on, should I be confirmed. These resources are critical.

I can say as a state commissioner, have so appreciated the Federal resources and commend Congress there. Should I be confirmed, it will be critical that SAMHSA continue to support states in funding prevention, and treatment, recovery, harm reduction, that we work across also Federal agencies and partners to ensure that our opioid response strategies are strong, that they are meeting people where they are, that they are helping people move into long term recovery.

You mentioned fentanyl. We know fentanyl is frequently present in many of the overdoses. We see that in Connecticut quite a bit. Thankfully, now SAMHSA states can use Federal funds to purchase fentanyl test strips. That is a significant change and will be of real value to states in terms of harm reduction.

Certainly all of those areas, should I be confirmed, would look forward to continuing to advance and would look forward to meeting with you, Senator, as well, to learn more about your needs and interests in this area as well.

Senator LUJAN. Well, I look forward to more conversations, especially learning about the kinds of initiatives that you launched in Connecticut that you believe can be launched across America to help people. Now, during COVID, we also have seen an increase in not just opioid use, but rightfully so that has been well documented. However, we have also seen an increase in alcohol use disorder as well.

Although not generated nearly the headlines, alcohol use disorder is far more prevalent than other forms of SUDs. We are going to need to do a better job of screening and identifying those with alcohol use disorders so we can get them the treatments that they greatly need. Between the President's proposed budget, COVID relief, and the recently passed American Rescue Plan, how would you utilize the investment in SAMHSA to help the estimated 15 million Americans suffering from alcohol dependence?

Ms. DELPHIN-RITTMON. Yes, I appreciate that question, Senator. We know that Americans across the country are struggling with alcohol use disorder. Certainly see that in Connecticut as well. When we met, I spoke about the recovery coach in our emergency Department initiative. Our recovery coaches connect with individuals who are brought to the emergency Departments as a function of acute alcohol intoxication, in many instances more than individuals who are brought there as a function of opioids. So we know that this is an area that is critical that we focus on.

If confirmed, I would be interested in working certainly within SAMHSA around continuing to scale up and put in place strategies to address opioid use disorder, and also be interested in working with you to learn more about what you are seeing and what the challenges and needs are within your state. But definitely this is an area that we need to address. We know Americans across the



country are struggling with alcohol use disorder as well as opioids and other substances. So appreciate that question, Senator.

Senator LUJAN. Thank you. Ms. O'Connell, Project Echo, which we had a chance to visit about, is an innovative telementary model headquartered at the University of New Mexico and was once championed by my late father when he was a member of the state legislature led by Dr. Sanjiv Aurora. On the 116th Congress, I was proud to work with my colleagues in the House and in the Senate to pass the Echo Act of 2019. How will ASPR continue to utilize telehealth and programs like Project Echo to create peer to peer learning networks to enhance preparedness in the future?

Ms. O'CONNELL. Senator Lujan, thank you so much for that question. And I enjoyed the opportunity to have this conversation about Project Echo when we spoke a few weeks ago. I think telehealth has been one of the successes that's come out of the pandemic. The pandemic, of course, has stressed the American society in so many ways.

But our ability to use telehealth and reach people to train doctors and nurses, to be able to treat people and harder to reach places, I think is going to be one of the legacies, excuse me, of the pandemic that we take with us, and we will be able to use in ASPR moving forward when we are working with rural and hard to reach communities. So thank you and thank you to your father for his support of that initiative.

Senator LUJAN. Thank you. And I yield back.

The CHAIR. Thank you.

Senator Braun.

Senator BRAUN. Thank you, Madam Chair. My questions are for Dr. Delphin-Rittmon. Last Congress, Senator Markey and I introduced two pieces of legislation. One called the label Opioids Act, requires prescription opioids to contain a warning label specifying that opioids may cause dependence, addiction, and overdose. The Safer Prescribing of Controlled Substances Act would enforce new training regimens upon practitioners that would incorporate best practices on how to prescribe the pain medications.

HHS would prescribe these requirements in both of these acts. I think my question would be in taking legislation like that, and how do you view getting coordination between agencies so that even if ideas like this don't get incorporated in the law, that we do a better job of using the tools that we can administratively to do common sense things like proper labeling and practices that you would want practitioners to use in a kind of an elusive area that we have had marginal results with.

Ms. DELPHIN-RITTMON. Yes, thank you for that question, Senator, and for your work and advocacy in this really critical area. We know that looking at prescribing practices is one really key strategy for helping to address the overdose and addiction rates that we are seeing, substance use rates that we were seeing. And so I appreciate your work there. Should I be confirmed, you mentioned the piece around collaboration. As a clinical community psychologist, I love working from that space, bringing groups together that are connected to or that touch an issue to think creatively around how we can come up with strategies that make a difference.

I would welcome that opportunity within HHS. There is an internal HHS Behavioral Health Coordinating Council. That is certainly one space where some of this work could be done, but also would look forward to bringing together states. As a Commissioner, I so appreciated the times when SAMHSA brought the Commissioners together to have conversations. And we often say that we love sort of bootlegging from each other, and we love sort of taking the best practices that we hear working in different states. And so I think there are opportunities, should I be confirmed, to bring states together on a regular basis for that state to state learning in conversation.

But I appreciate, again, your work in this area, should I be confirmed. Would look forward to having follow-up conversations, and do believe that the collaboration across Federal agencies, states, as well as community partners is critical here for addressing this challenge.

Senator BRAUN. I think in addition to alerting practitioners and patients of all the pitfalls of using opioids, that there needs to be some emphasis on other methodology, other ways of trying to address chronic pain. Now, where you at on trying to be a voice for alternatives in addition to trying to do a better job with what we do with opioids, in other words, new ideas?

Ms. DELPHIN-RITTMON. Yes, thank you for that, Senator. So I am a full believer in the value of using really all that will work. This is such a challenge in terms of the overdose rates we are seeing across the country. I think it is critical that we marshal all tools or resources we know that can make a difference. There is a vast amount of literature on alternative strategies for managing pain. It doesn't always have to be a pill. For some individuals, meditation or reiki or acupuncture can make a difference in terms of pain management.

I think it is critical to look at some of those evidence based practices as well and offer them to individuals to the extent that it fits with their treatment spectrum. But I appreciate that question. It is something in Connecticut that we have put in place. Auricular acupuncture has been shown to help with cravings.

It is an emerging evidence based practice, and so should I be confirmed, would look forward to exploring other strategies, really, for addressing pain management. So, thank you for that question.

Senator BRAUN. I think that is important in terms of alternative methods and then maybe also for pharma to be looking at ways that they need to invest in pain management that doesn't rely on so much emphasis on opioids. So thank you so much.

Ms. DELPHIN-RITTMON. You are welcome.

The CHAIR. Thank you.

Senator Baldwin.

Senator BALDWIN. Thank you, Madam Chair. For Ms. O'Connell, I appreciated the chance to speak with you a few weeks back. And one of the things we talked about was our domestic manufacturing capabilities here. I have long been a champion of buy America policies and domestic manufacturing. And part of the reason I became first interested in that was during my time in the House of Representatives, we would have hearings on the seasonal influenza vaccine, etcetera, and I became very concerned that we didn't have

any, in some cases, or enough companies producing these vaccines here at home.

I think that presently we have seen very clearly that we don't have enough companies making medical countermeasure and devices, etcetera, here in America. It has been an erosion over time, but it has left us really unprepared to respond to pandemics, including the one that we are emerging from. Now, the Pentagon is in charge of monitoring the defense industrial base. But I think we need somebody charged with monitoring the public health industrial base to monitor the domestic sources of drugs, of raw materials, medical devices, personal protective equipment, and other critical products that we have seen in short supply during this pandemic and monitoring the capacity available to make these products in a crisis.

Do you think that Health and Human Services, including ASPR, should take a more active role in both monitoring the public health industrial base and actively addressing current domestic manufacturing constraints through improvements to long term contracting and purchasing commitments and additional transparency?

Ms. O'CONNELL. Senator Baldwin, thank you so much for that question and thank you for the good conversation we had a few weeks ago. I think you are right on, HHS should be charged with monitoring and maintaining a resilient and secure medical and public health supply chain. And the ASPR, the Acting ASPR right now has been leading an interagency effort with the supply chain coordinator at the White House, part of the COVID response, to oversee this work. What we saw last year was unprecedented.

We saw the global community all needing the same components at the same time, and it was unprecedented, but it was also a warning that we have been too reliant on international sources for some of these components. I think if I am confirmed, a lot of the work that I will do ahead will be to take on what the Acting ASPR has been doing, and to make sure that we have a secure and resilient public health emergency and medical supply chain. The ASPR currently has something called the watchtower, where they are watching and monitoring all of the medical supplies to understand what the push and pulls are.

That is something that came up, I believe, under Dr. Kadlec's leadership in the last year, and it is something, should I be confirmed, as ASPR would expect will be a critical part of the work that I undertake to secure the medical supply chain.

Senator BALDWIN. Thank you. In the previous administration, there was very little transparency when it came to understanding how decisions were being made with regard to combating COVID-19. And I think the lack of critical information impacted our ability to respond. And going forward, I think we must work to ensure that members of the public and certainly Members of Congress have accurate and necessary information when it comes to both our preparedness needs and our response to future crises.

We must ensure that we make responsible investments and that those are informed by science and public health and not special interests. And so how will you work to improve transparency when it comes to ASPR's work and spending? And will you commit to combating the power of special interests at the agency?

Ms. O'CONNELL. Senator, thank you for this question. I think one of the major lessons learned over the last year and a half is how critical open and transparent communication is. And when the information changes, how important it is to let the American public know what we are now learning has changed.

If I am confirmed as the ASPR, I commit to open and transparent dialog with this Committee, with other Members of Congress that are interested in the work that ASPR is doing, with the constituencies and stakeholders that are invested to make sure that I am held accountable for the work that I am doing and that it is fitting in to the priorities that Congress has set out for ASPR, and that the American public expects from ASPR.

Senator BALDWIN. Thank you.

The CHAIR. Thank you.

Senator COLLINS.

Senator COLLINS. Thank you. Dr. Delphin-Rittmon, yesterday we had a good conversation about our shared concern that the country is going in the wrong direction with respect to overall drug use and overdose fatalities. It is said very plainly in a newspaper headline from Maine, Maine's overdose deaths set a new record in 2020, and 2021 started out even worse. Maine saw a 32 percent increase in overdose deaths in 2020 and actually more people died from overdose deaths than died from COVID.

This trend, unfortunately, is true nationally as well. COVID certainly played a role and was a setback. It caused the increased isolation, new stresses, challenges in accessing prevention and treatment services. It impeded recovery supports, like peer support programs, which I know both you and I believe can be highly effective. But the fact remains, we had 502 people die in 2020 of drug overdoses and that far surpassed the previous high in 2017, which we thought at the time was the height of the epidemic.

The subsequent years started edging down and then we had this large increase. What specifically do you think we should be doing to counter drug overdoses?

Ms. DELPHIN-RITTMON. Thank you for that question, Senator, and for the conversation that we had yesterday. And my condolences to the people of your state. It is—the overdose deaths are hard. They have ripple effects across communities and families and individuals. And so this is a challenge that as a country, we have been grappling with it and we really need to continue to grapple with it. I think we can take what we have learned and what we have seen up to this point that makes a difference. When we look at data across the country, we see that fentanyl is one thing that is driving many of the overdose deaths.

We know now that Federal resources can be used to test substances for fentanyl. That could make a significant difference. If individuals are aware that there is fentanyl in the substances, that could help to bring overdose deaths down. It is a harm reduction strategy. And so in addition to, giving people a fentanyl test strip, there is an opportunity to let them know about services and supports. And often when people in recovery are running the harm reduction centers are a part of that work, there is also an opportunity for people in recovery to give individuals hope and to let

them know that they can make it to the other side of their addiction. And so we have seen that make a difference in Connecticut.

I think fentanyl test strips can make a difference. As we have talked, I think recovery coaches and emergency Departments can make a difference. We just finished an analysis in Connecticut that shows that—so we looked at data. It shows that individuals who have a recovery coach within this 3 year period that we are looking at where 2.6 times less likely to die by the end of the study. So recovery coaches can help connect people to services and supports. And that is what we found in this study. It was an invited evaluation that SAMHSA asked us to do based on this initiative.

We now currently have recovery coaches in 25 emergency Departments across the state. We also know medication assisted treatment makes a difference. It is one strategy that is an evidence based practice that can help people move into long term recovery. One thing that we have implemented in Connecticut is mobile medication as a treatment. People aren't always going to come in to services and supports, but we can bring services and support to community members, particularly if we use data and take a data approach to have the mobile medication assisted treatment vans go to where hotspots are and go to where we know vulnerable populations are.

I think there are things we can do looking at what we have done up to this point that makes a difference. And should I be confirmed, will be happy to have conversations with you about this and about what you are seeing in Maine. So thank you.

Senator COLLINS. Thank you. Ms. O'Connell, last month, HHS devoted more than \$2 billion meant for other health initiatives toward covering the cost of caring for unaccompanied immigrant children, migrant children on the Southern border. The redirected funds that included \$850 million that Congress originally allocated to rebuilding the Nation's strategic national stockpile. Well, another \$850 million is being taken from money that was set aside to expand COVID testing. Out of all the programs that could possibly be chosen to reprogram funds, why was the SNS chosen, and what is the plan to make sure it is not shortchanged?

Ms. O'CONNELL. Senator Collins, thank you so much for that question. When the American Rescue Plan was being negotiated, the Department became aware of how expensive it was going to be to care for the increasing number of minors at the border in times of COVID. COVID required that these minors be separated so the shelters had to be larger, less full, the minors had to be tested. There were just significant costs that came along with caring for the unaccompanied minors in a pandemic.

At that time, the Department worked with Congress to have \$850 million appropriated to support that work. And it was in that bucket that you are referring to that money was added. And so my understanding after talking to our budget team is that it was a zero sum, that money, the \$850 million was put in for that purpose and has been used for that purpose and that the stockpile has not been impacted.

Senator COLLINS. I will say that is not my understanding. Thank you.

The CHAIR. Thank you.

Senator Casey.

Senator CASEY. Thanks, Chair Murray. I want to thank our witnesses for your commitment to public service and your commitment to excellence, as well as you do that service and obviously the commitment of your families to that service that you have engaged in. I want to start with Ms. O'Connell. Both in reference to the pandemic all hazards legislation over time, as well as a bill that I have introduced, the so-called Ready Act, it is a Real Emergency Access for Aging and Disability Inclusion for Disasters Act, a long name that needs an acronym, the Ready Act. I have prioritized, including both people with disabilities and older adults in all phases of the disaster process, both preparation and response, as well as recovery and mitigation.

When I outlined that, I don't mean simply having older adults and people with disabilities give public comments or be advisory board members. I mean, be on the panels and on the Committees that decide how best to prepare for disasters and be—really be part of the process of responding and deciding on what mitigation should look like. So I am looking for true engaged participation in all of these processes of protecting Americans and responding to their needs. So I ask for your commitment regarding these Americans.

Again, I am talking about people with disabilities and older adults. Ensuring that these Americans are represented and have a strong voice in all phases of emergency and disaster processes, and I ask you to commit to report back to the Committee how you are including these Americans in the work that the ASPR does.

Ms. O'CONNELL. Senator Casey, thank you so much for that question. I appreciated the conversation we had a few weeks ago where we were able to touch on some of these important issues. And I want to thank you for your long time leadership representing and supporting these vulnerable populations. These vulnerable populations are often overlooked in planning and preparedness exercises. And should I be confirmed as ASPR, you have my commitment that I will not overlook these populations and will work to ensure that they have the tools they need in any public health emergency.

Senator CASEY. Look forward to having some feedback after your confirmation. Dr. Delphin-Rittmon, I wanted to ask you about children's mental health, in particular as we consider where we are after, or we hope, coming out of the pandemic. Even before the pandemic, we were facing both a behavioral and mental health crisis, particularly for children and for teenagers. The pandemic obviously has amplified this need with both rising numbers of patients and increased severity of symptoms that require more substantial treatment resources.

At the same time, we have urgent workforce shortages. In Pennsylvania, pediatric health care providers report that children are waiting sometimes not just weeks, but even months to get the mental health care services they need, which, of course, puts them at risk for worsening illness and suicide. If confirmed, how would you use SAMHSA's authorities to work with Federal and state, as well as local partners to strengthen the pediatric, mental, and behav-

ioral health workforce, to meet the needs of children and teens experiencing mental health issues?

Ms. DELPHIN-RITTMON. Thank you for that—thank you for that question, Senator. We know that this is such a critical area right now in terms of the workforce shortages we are seeing across the country within children’s mental health, but really across the board. In terms of children’s mental health, we are seeing a shortage of psychiatrists and other behavioral health workers who are trained to be able to work with children. I think SAMHSA can play a real role here, collaborating with other Federal partners that are working on this area.

HERSA does quite a bit related to workforce development, and I think there are opportunities to collaborate with HERSA and other Federal partners. We know that loan repayment programs or fellowship programs do make a difference in terms of bringing providers into a field. They are real valuable incentives. And, I am a testament to that being a fellow of the minority fellowship program. So certainly that is one area that we could look at to begin to grow and expand the workforce. Other things like telehealth though. I think to address the immediate needs that we are seeing in terms of shortages, particularly in rural areas, telehealth can play a real value in terms of connecting kids and families to services and supports where providers may not physically be.

I think there are opportunities there. But should I be confirmed, would look forward to working across the range of diverse partners that touch this issue. Community providers touch it, states touch it. There is quite a bit of innovation happening at the state level. And so as a Commissioner, again, I think one thing SAMHSA can do is bring together states from state to state learning around best practices.

I think that is certainly a key strategy. But appreciate the question, Senator. And should I be confirmed, I would look forward to following up with you on this as well to hear about some of your ideas.

Senator CASSIDY. Thank you, doctor. Thanks, Chair Murray.

The CHAIR. Thank you.

Senator HASSAN.

Senator HASSAN. Well, thank you, Chair Murray and Ranking Member Burr. Thank you to our nominees for being here today, both of you, and for your families, for your willingness to serve. I want to start with a couple of questions to you, Dr. Delphin-Rittmon, and I appreciated our conversation just yesterday. As the opioid epidemic has devastated communities and families across the country. You just spoke to that eloquently a few minutes ago. Since 2017, I have worked with my colleagues to secure funding for state opioid response grants, including more than \$86 million for New Hampshire. This funding has enabled states to expand access to lifesaving treatment and services for those struggling with substance use disorder. But I am concerned that hard won progress may be in jeopardy.

As we discussed yesterday, some of the hardest hit states, including New Hampshire, are at risk of a dramatic cut in state opioid response grant levels under the program’s current funding formula. So, doctor, from your experience as Commissioner of the Con-

necticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, can you speak to the importance of reliable, robust funding for mental health and substance use disorders services for states?

Ms. DELPHIN-RITTMON. Yes, thank you for that question, Senator, and for our conversation yesterday. I appreciated hearing about your priorities and what you are seeing within New Hampshire. We are neighbors, so what happens in New Hampshire impacts the region. What happens in Connecticut impacts, New Hampshire? So, the reliable funding is critical. It is important to be able to keep programs going in a stable way to ensure that the programs are available for individuals that are relying on them. We routinely have internal discussions around sustainability and how to think about continuing programs. So the reliable continuity of funding is a critical issue related to maintaining robust service systems.

Senator HASSAN. Well, thank you. If confirmed, will you commit to ensuring that the funding formula for state opioid response grants does not cause States like New Hampshire to experience dramatic funding cliff?

Ms. DELPHIN-RITTMON. Yes. No, I appreciate that question, Senator, and your advocacy, your fierce advocacy for the people of New Hampshire and across the country. If I am confirmed—again because we, we are seeing the rates continue to rise, and if I am confirmed, I commit to doing all that we can to address the overdose rates that we are seeing across the country, to include ensuring that, states receive resources that they need to be able to address the crisis.

Senator HASSAN. Right. And I understand that you are a nominee, and it is a little bit difficult when you are not yet part of an administration to make a commitment. But I am asking for a specific commitment here for a reason. I have asked the same question of the HHS Secretary, the Deputy Secretary, and others during their confirmation processes. They tell me that they are not—at that point, they told me they weren't yet part of the Administration, but now they have been confirmed and the Department is still not committing to fixing this problem.

Is it your understanding that SAMHSA has the authority to make adjustments to the state opioid response grant program, for example, increasing the number of hardest hit states beyond 10? Do you understand that you have—that SAMHSA has the authority to do that?

Ms. DELPHIN-RITTMON. Senator, I am not at SAMHSA yet. And certainly one of my priorities is expanding access to mental health and substance use services. The funding component of addressing the crisis is quite critical. Should I be confirmed, this certainly is one of the areas that I would be interested in looking at. And it would be critical to look at to get a better understanding of the funding processes.

Senator HASSAN. Well, we will follow-up with you on this, because this is an issue about the Department and your understanding of SAMHSA's authority. Will you work to ensure transparency and collaboration between congressional offices and SAMHSA on this and other issues related to funding formulas?



Ms. DELPHIN-RITTMON. Absolutely, Senator. I love working from that space and would ensure transparency, collaboration, ongoing discussions as necessary to further unpack and address this issue.

Senator HASSAN. Okay, I am going to follow-up with questions on the record on this topic before your markup to get more precision and clarity about the path forward. Because what I want to stress here today is that simply shifting grant funding from state to state as data shifts and as a substance use disorder crisis worsens just isn't a viable long term solution. We are going to play whack a mole. One state is going to bump into the top 10 so we are going to shift funding there. Other states, the crisis will worsen, we will shift funding back. That doesn't help us get to where we need to be, which is to combat the substance use disorder as the epidemic and health care crisis that it is.  
submitted for the Record.]

I am really looking forward to working with the Administration on this, but I am also looking for commitments from the Administration. I also just wanted to briefly touch on the X-Waiver. One of the limits that we have in accessing substance use disorders treatment is the existence of this so-called X-Waiver. Doctors can prescribe an opioid without getting special permission, but they can't prescribe medication, assisted treatment without getting this waiver.

Senator Murkowski and I have a bill to eliminate that waiver. Will you commit to working to expand access to medication assisted treatment by supporting efforts that Senator Murkowski and I are undertaking to eliminate the X-Waiver?

Ms. DELPHIN-RITTMON. Yes, I appreciate that question, Senator. And so we know medications as a treatment, as I mentioned, it absolutely helps people move into long term recovery. As one of my priorities around expanding access to substance abuse and mental health services, that includes expanding access to medication assisted treatment. So I can commit to certainly meeting with you and to working to expand access across the country.

Senator HASSAN. Okay, thank you. It is going to be critical to getting existing doctors able to provide this treatment. Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The CHAIR. Thank you.

Senator Marshall.

Senator MARSHALL [continuing]. Figure out which mic is better for me to use. Thank you so much. My first question is for Ms. O'Connell. Ms. O'Connell, dealing with antibiotic resistant bacteria continues to be a challenge. And here is the challenge. You don't need to use these antibiotics very often, but when you need to, you really need them. If a patient is sitting there dying in the ICU because of a bacteria that is resistant to antibiotics, we need a special laser to go in there and treat the problem.

Anyway, most of the pharmaceutical companies are not developing them because it is not profitable. They don't get used very often, but yet we need them, right. So I hope you are little bit familiar with the challenge there. There is just not a good return on investment. There is 43 antibiotics in development right now.

My question for you is, how can we work together to ensure that BARDA provides the private sector and the necessary resources to strengthen antibiotic research and development?

Ms. O'CONNELL. Senator, thank you so much for your question. And I really appreciated the opportunity to speak with you a few weeks ago. Antibiotic resistance is a significant issue. When I was Deputy Chief of Staff in the Obama administration, one of the jobs that I was responsible for was implementing President Obama's antimicrobial resistance agenda across the interagency, it was called CARB, Combating Antibiotic Resistant Bacteria.

As part of that initiative, BARDA took on something called Carb-X, which was a private, public partnership to accelerate the development of antibiotics and to try to get pharmaceutical companies willing to begin looking at new antibiotics. Since I have been back and working solely on COVID, I am not sure where we are with the Carb-X initiative. But Senator, I commit to you, if I am confirmed as ASPR, that is one of the first things I will do and look forward to working with you and reporting back on where that progress is.

Senator MARSHALL. That is great. If there is anything we can do to put wind beneath your sails, if you are confirmed, please reach out to us. It is an issue near and dear to my heart. My next question for Dr. Delphin-Rittmon, if you don't mind, I want to talk about certified community behavioral health clinics for a second. And one of the biggest challenges I see in our hospitals is dealing with mentally ill, having a mental crisis in an emergency room. And this has been a problem going back to when I was in medical school.

This typical situation is, we admit a patient in the emergency room that is a danger to themselves and others. And really, there is just no good discharge plan so that patients sits there for 24, 48 hours at a time. We have a special room for that person. We have to put a nurse one on one. Our sheriff's officers or police officers have to provide an officer, one on one to take care of that situation. And they are just, certainly at the state level, we need more opportunities.

But we did a consolidated appropriations grant in December. We authorized millions of dollars to certify community behavioral health clinics. Our sheriff's officers feel like they are being left out of the loop on how to use those moneys and what the solution looks like. And I am not sure if you are familiar with that grant, but I sure hope that we include law enforcement, that these community behavioral health clinics reach out to the law enforcement and to the nurses and the hospitals. It needs to be a team effort.

I can tell you story after story of, a person that the sheriff's office thought was headed to the mental health center. They were discharged later without notifying the sheriff's officers and a murder resulted. And unfortunately, this happens too often and any light you can shed and commitment to this issue.

Ms. DELPHIN-RITTMON. Yes. Thank you for that question, Senator. And I appreciate our discussion several weeks ago as well. This is a critical issue. And I do have to say that CCBHCs, so the certified community behavioral health centers, we so appreciate those resources in Connecticut. We have several that have been

stood up across the state. It is a real opportunity to provide integrated care, to get people connected to both primary care, but also behavioral health services and supports.

Certainly, it is an opportunity also to connect with other community providers, as you mentioned, to include police officers. And so I think that is a valuable component of that framework. I think a role SAMHSA can play there with the CCBHCs, but also with the enhanced crisis services and supports through the 988 implementation—I think there is a real opportunity to bring in police Departments and officers there as well as part of the crisis continuum response.

Certainly, if I am confirmed, would be—look forward to working with you and others there. But this is a real critical area in terms of getting people connected to the needed services. And the role that community, policing your community officers can play as it relates to connecting people with mental health services and supports.

Senator MARSHALL. Well, great. If we have the opportunity to get some of the pieces of the puzzle together, our office or someone from your staff, we would love to talk too. And thank you so much, Madam Chair. I yield back.

The CHAIR. Thank you.

Senator Murphy.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Thank you both for your service and your continued willingness to serve. Commissioner, I am very sorry that I was not here at the outset of the meeting to introduce you, but I know that Senator Blumenthal did a more than adequate job. I just wanted to spend 1 minute at the beginning of my few moments of remarks to just commend Commissioner Delphin-Rittmon to the Committee. She and I have known each other. We have worked very closely together.

I got the chance to chair the Health Committee when I was in the state legislature, and the Mental Health Reform Act that Senator Cassidy referenced passed in late 2016, was a product of the work of this Committee, the collaboration of Senator Cassidy and myself, but also the result of I don't know how many meetings that the Commissioner and I did together in Connecticut, developing ideas for the legislation and seeking input from a cross-section of consumers, patients, and providers, and advocates in Connecticut.

I am deeply grateful to her for how much work she put in to trying to help us develop sound Federal policy. And some of the work she has pioneered in Connecticut, we have lifted and brought to the whole country. For instance, Connecticut modeled a program whereby we put recovery coaches inside emergency rooms. These are, folks who have had lived experience often with recovering from substance abuse.

We have them anchored in our emergency rooms. And so when someone presents often with an overdose, the minute that they interact with a provider, they are also interacting with someone who has gone through the same experience they have. And that recovery coach funded by the Department of Mental Health and Education Services in Connecticut stays with them after they leave.

And that early interaction, we have found, has made a very big difference.

We now have a Federal grant program that will allow for other states to copy Connecticut's model. So I am deeply appreciative of the work that she has done to pioneer some pretty innovative programming that we now are being able to disperse nationwide. So I am very, very, very glad to have you on the precipice of this incredibly important role. Have enjoyed our time working together in Connecticut. I just have sort of one question for you, Commissioner. In the Mental Health Reform Act of 2016, we elevated the role of SAMHSA Director to an Assistant Secretary position. We thought that was really important because there are so many conversations that happen at the leadership level in HHS that SAMHSA needs to be at the table on.

I will give you two examples and maybe ask you to just comment on how you might be able to sort of move forward the conversation in two regards. First is on the issue of physical and behavioral health integration, something you have spent a lot of time working on in Connecticut. For instance, we have tried to get more mental health services into our community, federally qualified community health care clinics.

I would love to see there be a more aggressive conversation Department wide on making sure that we are providing grants to states that incentivize mental health and physical health services coming together. Second is the issue of parity. Again, a conversation that happens at HHS but also has intersections at DOL because they regulate a lot of these insurance plans. Senator Cassidy and I introduced legislation, I think, just yesterday that continues to build upon our efforts to enforce existing Federal parity laws, meaning you cover mental health just like you cover physical health.

But we can't make progress on that unless we are cooperating across Departments. And that is, again, an opportunity for an Assistant Secretary as opposed to the prior sort of more compartmented role, just overseeing SAMHSA, to be able to make a difference. So in the minute that I have left you remaining to just comment on the priority you may place on integration and parity.

Ms. DELPHIN-RITTMON. Yes. Thank you for that question, Senator. And I just so have appreciated your advocacy and work in Connecticut. The recovery coaches were just thrilled to be able to have that work elevated at a national level. And we know that work can make a difference. So both parity and health care integration would be in our priorities for me. I see those as connected to expanding access to mental health services and supports which one of my primary priorities. You are right, though. The parity piece requires quite a bit of collaboration across HHS and community partners and state partners as well. And as a clinical community psychology, I love working from that space. I think that is where the work often happens. Bringing people together and figuring it out. Staying at the table and really figuring it out.

Should I be confirmed, I would look forward to that. I do think there is a real opportunity now that the SAMHSA role has been elevated as part of HHS. And I thank you for your leadership and advocacy there as well. And so, again, there is just an opportunity

to work across HHS agencies that touch the two issues that you mentioned, both health care integration as well as health care parity or mental health parity.

Should I be confirmed, I would look forward to working across Departments, but also with you and others in Congress to address those important areas. So thank you for that question.

Senator MARSHALL. Great. I look forward to working with both of you. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Senator BURR. Senator Rosen.

Senator ROSEN. Well, thank you, Senator Burr. And, of course, Madam Chair, for holding this hearing. And to our nominees, thank you for your prior service, your willingness to serve again. I would like to speak a little bit about our supply chain safety net. As the pandemic spread and critical medical equipment such as masks, gowns, even ventilators, became scarce and in high demand, so many of our small and medium sized manufacturers, they just stepped up, including several companies in Nevada. They retooled their facilities.

They did their part to meet the needs brought on by this public health crisis. And they no doubt saved many lives by doing that. And we are very grateful. So, Ms. O'Connell, as Congress and the Administration, you are going to consider changes to the strategic national stockpile. What considerations are being made to develop a domestic backup supply chain? This could be a network of smaller manufacturers who may do something else during normal production times and then they ramp up.

Well, how do we support them to maintain their readiness? How do we use them to improve our future readiness? And would you commit with me to work on this.

Ms. O'CONNELL. Senator, thank you so much for that question. What we saw in this last year and a half was a real warning sign that we did not have a secure and resilient public health and medical supply chain. And one of the reasons is we had such reliance on international components. So if confirmed, one of the places I expect to spend a lot of my time is figuring out how to increase domestic manufacturing, what incentives we should offer. It has been extraordinary what some of the small manufacturers, including those in your state, did.

We heard the stories early in the pandemic of the vodka company that started making hand sanitizer, or I think in Colorado there was a mattress manufacturer that started making masks. We should reward that kind of innovation. That is exactly what built America and what we are going to need in order to move out of this pandemic. And so I just look forward to working with you and Members of this Committee on figuring out how we can incentivize and encourage that sort of domestic manufacturing so it is not just a once in a pandemic experience, but it is something that we can maintain and rely on and create a secure supply chain.

Senator ROSEN. Yes, I couldn't agree more. I think we have to incentivize them to kind of do this maybe in the background from their regular business, so they are ready to surge up if unfortunately we need them, because there are so many lessons that we learn from emergency response, because the pandemic has just lit-

erally changed almost every aspect of our life, how we work, how we socialize, and now we take steps to move back to normal.

Look, here we are in this hearing. So, Ms. O'Connell, what do you think, and I know we only have 2 minutes, so it is bigger than 2 minutes, but what does HHS's role and what are the most important lessons that we learn from this so we can start thinking about how we support our communities and our Country doing all of this going forward?

Ms. O'CONNELL. That is such a critical question at this time, where we hope we are at an inflection point in the pandemic as we are working to get 70 percent of adults with at least their first dose of vaccine by July 4th. We are starting to see America return to normal, and we do need to start capturing the lessons learned. And one of the commitments I will make, if confirmed as ASPR, is not just to go through a lessons learned process, but to actually apply those lessons moving forward.

Often in response efforts, we review what happened and we write up a report and we put it on the shelf until the next one comes. What I would like to do is actually apply those lessons and make sure that we have the advantage of everything that we learned this time to be ready for the next public health emergency.

Senator ROSEN. I think that is a great idea, apply the lessons. And something that I would like to move on quickly in my last few seconds, Dr. Delphin-Rittmon, grief counseling. So many people have just lost their loved ones. I know we have over 40,000 children who have lost a parent, that the grief is enormous, enormous burden for so many across not just our Country, but in the world too. What should we be doing to provide grief counseling in the wake of COVID even more robustly than we might already do in hospice situations or some of those things? And this is trauma. It may be in a different way than when we have disasters or public health emergency. What do you think about grief counseling and the role there?

Ms. DELPHIN-RITTMON. Thank you for that question, Senator. So grief counseling, as we know right now, is so critical. The last year, in addition to losing friends and loved ones and family members, there has been losses related to just the daily rhythms of our lives, children not being able to participate in sports events or not being able to participate in the rhythms of family events.

I would say that the grief and loss related to the pandemic related experiences is some of what is contributing to the higher rates of anxiety and depression and substance use that we are seeing across the country right now. So grief counseling is, I think, a critical part of the mental health work that needs to be done across the country. So states right now, I mean, I certainly from a state perspective, and SAMHSA can support this, so states have increased resources related to the block grant, the American rescue dollars, and, all of those resources at a local and state level are being used to expand services, whether it is mental health or substance abuse services.

I think the grief counseling on the mental health side could certainly be part of—it needs to be part of that mental health work. SAMHSA can play a role there from the treatment and technical assistance area we provide—or SAMHSA provides quite a bit of

technical assistance to states. I know we certainly appreciate it in Connecticut and welcome those dollars.

I think this is an area where some of those TA dollars can be used to strengthen the counseling skills of individuals within states to the extent that it needs—may need to be expanded. So appreciate that question. I think this is certainly an area that is important to look at, an area that SAMHSA can play a real role in. Should I be confirmed, would look forward to working with you further on this. Thank you.

Senator ROSEN. I think we really need to work on this in our schools in particular, as these kids go back. They are so vulnerable. Thank you so much.

Ms. DELPHIN-RITTMON. Yes. Thank you.

Senator BURR. Governor.

Senator HICKENLOOPER. Thank you, Senator. First, before I say anything, just thank you both for your service, especially at this time when there is, as you are clearly aware, such great need. Let me start out with Dr. Delphin-Rittmon. I appreciate tremendously your commitment. And as someone who lived in Connecticut for 10 years, a long, long time ago, I appreciate your service there and your comments about the issues around child mental health. We have seen a 90 percent increase in behavioral visits at our children's hospital in Colorado—a 90 percent increase in just these past years.

There really is a pediatric mental health pandemic and it certainly is also tied—the question I want to get to is, we have a just a terrible, terrible challenge with the opioids, as you well know, and the Colorado Health Foundation recently came out with a survey that more than half of Coloradoans suffer from increased mental health strain from the pandemic. This has led to just out of control increases in drug overdoses and drug use.

In May 2020, we had 130 people die of a drug overdose. That is nearly double the average rate of all of 2019. And we have seen just a dramatic uptick this year as well. I know that addressing opioid use has been a major priority for you. And how can we make sure that states like Colorado and so many other states are able to access all the resources available to them through SAMHSA and ensure that they are—that we are using those resources in the most efficient way?

Ms. DELPHIN-RITTMON. Yes, thank you for that question, Senator. And I appreciate the meeting that we had a couple of weeks ago. I appreciate hearing about your priorities and your advocacy for the people of your state and the country. So, yes, SAMHSA can play a real role in assisting states around the resources that are being provided. We know that work in the area of prevention and treatment and recovery, harm reduction, even working with criminal justice systems and supports can help to make a difference as it relates to opioid patterns and trends, as well as the mental health trends that we are seeing in the country.

SAMHSA can certainly play a role there in terms of supporting states. Would be happy, if I am confirmed, to meet with you, to learn more about what you are seeing and experiencing within Colorado. As I mentioned previously, that bringing states together for the state to state learning and sharing around best practices,

around what we see that is making a difference, SAMHSA can play a real role there as well. Through the Behavioral Coordinating Council.

Again, that would be an internal group. Many different agencies touch this important work. And so there are opportunities to do important work there as well. But should I be confirmed, would look forward to having follow-up conversations with you and working across HHS, as well as with states and community providers on this critical issue as well. Thank you.

Senator HICKENLOOPER. No, thank you. And thank you for your time and your commitment. Ms. O'Connell, thank you as well for—this is a unique time to step up and I really appreciate that. The Biden administration has made significant efforts to really begin making inroads into reaching out to the minority communities when it comes to COVID-19 response and the vaccination effort.

I think the key here is we can't stop with what we have seen from the COVID-19 response, and we need to invest in the public health infrastructure necessary to make sure that we not only maintain but expand the contact within these communities so that in the next pandemic, the next disaster, we don't find ourselves triaging at the last minute, but we are able to be out ahead of this and have relationships and networks in place. So question, how will you continue the Administration's outreach efforts to these sometimes hard to reach communities?

Ms. O'CONNELL. Senator, thank you so much for that important question. The Biden administration has made equity a cornerstone of its response, and that has been important to me. It is interwoven in everything that it is considered and done, including, as you mentioned, the vaccine distribution efforts. It focused on not just going fast, but fairly. And I think that's an important lesson that I will carry with me, should I be confirmed as ASPR, that it is critically important that the PPE, the vaccines, the therapeutics, all of the tools needed to fight the pandemic are equitably distributed to all the communities.

One of the tools that we are currently using are trusted messengers. Making sure that trusted community leaders are sharing the message and helping communities access these critical tools. Should I be confirmed, I would continue to use that approach. The ASPR has a role with regional and local communities in helping prepare them for the next public health emergency, and it would be critical to me that equity is a part of that effort.

Senator BURR. Senator Murkowski.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for your commitment, your good work. Front page, front page of the Anchorage Daily newspaper this morning is kind of discouraging. An Alaska public health alert sent out on the increase in heroin overdose emergency Department visits in 2021. Since March of 2021, Alaska has experienced an increase in heroin overdose emergency visits compared to 2020. The average number has more than doubled. So we have seen a doubling from March 1 to May 29. And these are overdose deaths that are occurring in all regions of the state, but most increases in the South Central, Southeast area. There is still further review that is going on with regards to this, in terms of why this increase.



Is it supply, is purity of potency? It is, of course, always a concern, but when you see that dramatic increase, it causes lots of questions to be asked. One of the things that I would like to raise here as we are in the—we feel like it is the aftermath of COVID-19, but I have heard from so many around the State of Alaska on the need for recovery, housing for those that are experiencing homelessness, and substance abuse connected with that. So many of our rural communities lack detox centers or any recovery services whatsoever.

This is—this continues to be a struggle for us. But as we are looking to particularly our rural areas and the capacity issues and the funding to offer recovery services, how do we expand access to comprehensive recovery programs in addition to the tools that I am sure you have discussed as medically assisted treatment? And these are big questions that are not possible to really resolve in a few minutes. But just Dr. Delphin-Rittmon, if you would respond to that.

Then also, are we seeing in other parts of the country equally dramatic increases in instances of overdoses in our emergency rooms around the country?

Ms. DELPHIN-RITTMON. Thank you for that question, Senator, and for the meeting that we had a couple of weeks ago. It is tragic, to hear some of the stats related to the overdose deaths and the increases that we are seeing. I think it is critical to look at those things we know that can make a difference, and to the extent possible, to look at the data, to see what is driving some of the trends. Should I be confirmed, I would be interested in following up and having some follow-up conversations and discussions with you.

One thing that we saw in Connecticut was that fentanyl was driving some of our overdose deaths and so increasing the availability of fentanyl test strips. I think that can be of real value in terms of, helping to potentially reduce overdoses, but also potentially connect people to services and supports. So I think that could be a valuable strategy. In addition, recovery coaches, as we know. You mentioned the recovery housing.

Recovery housing can also make a real difference. Often within recovery housing, recovery coaches are available. Other wrap-around services and supports are available. It does provide an opportunity for people to be connected to other needed services. And so that is a real valuable resource as well. Should I be confirmed, would be very interested in, and again, having follow-up conversations with you. I think the resources that are currently available to states in terms of the block grant as well as some of the American rescue plan dollars, appreciate the Congress's work there, can help to fund some of these innovations that you have mentioned, whether it be recovery housing or enhancing even telehealth.

Telehealth, we know, can make a difference in rural areas where there are challenges with connectivity and connecting with providers. So those are just a few strategies that can make a difference. Certainly, this is one of my priorities, should I be confirmed. Would be interested in working with you and of course other states and across HHS on this critical issue. So thank you.

Senator MURKOWSKI. I appreciate that recognition. Also in our conversation that we had, and I appreciated that, the discussion

about suicide and the very unfortunate, again, statistics that we face in Alaska with the rates of suicide and particularly with our younger populations. We had—since March 2020, Juneau, Alaska has experienced 15 suicide attempts by children under the age of 15. And, you just—your heart just goes out. Most of those are the common—most common method that we saw there was pharmaceutical overdose.

Again, how we can deal with these issues that truly just eat away at the hearts of our communities is something that I want to be focused on. SAMHSA does have an important role in these services. But everything that we can do to promote suicide prevention, suicide prevention resources, reduce the stigma that is associated with seeking out mental health care, these are all problems that we should share in common and seek to address. Madam Chair, thank you.

The CHAIR. Thank you very much. That will end our hearing. And I want to thank all of our colleagues for their thoughtful questions. Ms. O'Connell, Dr. Delphin-Rittmon, thank you for your time. Thank you for your very insightful answers. For any Senator who wishes to ask additional questions, questions for the record will be due tomorrow, June 9th at 5 p.m.

The hearing record will remain open for 10 business days for Members who wish to submit additional materials for the record. And this Committee will next meet on Thursday, June 10th at 10 a.m. in Dirksen 106 for an executive session to mark up the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act Reauthorization of 2021.

## ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

May 25, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray, Chair  
Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions  
428 Senate Dirksen Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr, Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions  
428 Senate Dirksen Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Murray and Ranking Member Burr:

On behalf of the undersigned associations representing health plans, we write to express our strong support for the confirmation of Miriam E. Delphin-Rittmon as the next Assistant Secretary for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

Recent events have thrust the importance of behavioral health to the forefront. Last year, the Census Bureau reported that one-third of Americans were showing signs of clinical anxiety or depression due to the COVID-19 pandemic and that substance use disorders (SUDs) and suicide attempts are also on the rise.<sup>1</sup> Given these alarming statistics, we need an experienced and passionate public health leader at the helm of SAMHSA to steer efforts to reduce the impact of substance use and mental health disorders in our communities.

Dr. Miriam Delphin-Rittmon is precisely that leader for several key reasons. Firstly, she is already familiar with SAMHSA, having served as a Senior Advisor to the SAMHSA Administrator ensuring that she can quickly begin tackling the behavioral health crises in our country. Secondly, during her over 20 years in the mental health and addiction field, she has gained perspective of the relevant issues from a local, state, and national level which will allow her to have a nuanced approach when addressing issues such as workforce shortages, maternal mental health issues, and bridging gaps in behavioral health services in Medicaid. Additionally, as the Commissioner of Connecticut's Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services as well as a practicing clinical psychologist, she understands the importance of the need for providers to have comprehensive information about a patient in order to treat them properly, thus making her the optimal Assistant Secretary to oversee the promulgation of the next 42 CFR Part 2 Rule to allow for better flow of health information for patients with SUDs. Lastly, her experience in research and policy will help move SAMHSA and the industry forward. Data is at the crux of our decision

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<sup>1</sup> Alyssa Flowers, *A third of Americans now show signs of clinical anxiety or depression, Census Bureau finds amid coronavirus pandemic*. WASH. POST, May 26, 2020. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2020/05/26/americans-with-depression-anxiety-pandemic/>, last visited May 19, 2021.

making and having an Assistant Secretary who recognizes this important point will ensure that policymaking is based on evidence.

Dr. Delphin-Rittmon's career achievements prove she is an empathetic, thoughtful, and practical leader in behavioral health and her strategies for leading SAMHSA will benefit patients, providers, and payers. We look forward to working with her to ensure all Americans have access to services for their behavioral health needs. As such, we urge the Senate to swiftly confirm Dr. Delphin-Rittmon for this crucial role.

Sincerely,

Alliance of Community Health Plans

America's Health Insurance Plans

Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness

Association for Community Affiliated Plans

Blue Cross Blue Shield Association

Medicaid Health Plans of America

CC: Kelsey Mellette, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Legislation, Department of Health and Human Services

Bill Smith, Inseparable

June 4, 2021

Senator Patty Murray  
154 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Richard Burr  
217 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Murray and Ranking Member Burr:

On behalf of organizations working to expand access to substance use disorder prevention, treatment and recovery programs and services, we are writing in support of the nomination of Dr. Miriam Delphin-Rittmon as the Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). We believe Dr. Delphin-Rittmon has the knowledge, skills, and experience necessary to lead the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

Since 2015, Dr. Delphin-Rittmon has served as Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS), managing the State's publicly funded substance use and mental health service delivery system. DMHAS serves approximately 110,000 individuals annually in part through 13 local mental health authorities Statewide, and 160 community private nonprofit providers. The agency is comprised of 3,200 employees with an operating budget of approximately \$720 million. In addition, Dr. Delphin-Rittmon served as co-chair of the State's Alcohol and Drug Policy Council, an entity designed to develop a coordinated Statewide response to alcohol and other drug problems.

During her tenure, Dr. Delphin-Rittmon worked to navigate a number of complicated challenges. For example, she had to quickly adapt to the ever-changing needs related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, Dr. Delphin-Rittmon worked to lead the State in addressing the opioid epidemic – utilizing innovative tools to save lives and enhance access to services along the continuum. Finally, she provided leadership during times of crisis – including natural disasters that included floods and hurricanes.

Prior to serving as Commissioner, she served as DMHAS's Deputy Commissioner, Senior Policy Advisor, and the Director of the Department's Office of Multicultural Healthcare Equity. In May 2014, Dr. Delphin-Rittmon completed a two-year White House appointment working as a Senior Advisor to the Administrator of SAMHSA. In this role, she led numerous policy initiatives addressing health equity, workforce development, and healthcare reform.

Dr. Delphin-Rittmon received her B.A. in Social Science from Hofstra University, her M.S. and Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from Purdue University. She completed a postdoctoral fellowship in clinical community psychology at Yale University. Currently, Dr. Delphin-Rittmon serves as an Associate Adjunct Professor of Psychiatry at the Yale School of Medicine and has been Director of Cultural Competence and Health Disparities Research and Consultation and Yale's Program for Recovery and Community Health (PRCH).

Dr. Delphin-Rittmon has received number of awards throughout her career, including the 2019 State service award from the National Association of State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors (NASADAD) and the 2016 Mental Health Award for Excellence from the United Nations Committee on Mental Health.

We strongly support the confirmation of Dr. Delphin-Rittmon to as Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use. We look forward to working with you as the nomination process moves forward.

Sincerely,

American Association for the Treatment of Opioid Disorders (AATOD)

Addiction Professionals of North Carolina

Behavioral Health Association of Providers

California Consortium of Addiction Programs and Professionals

Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA)

Connecticut Certification Board

Faces and Voices of Recovery

Illinois Association of Behavioral Health

Legal Action Center (LAC)

NAADAC-the Association for Addiction Professionals

National Association of Addiction Treatment Providers (NAATP)

National Association for Children of Addiction (NACoA)

National Association of Drug Court Professionals (NADCP)

National Association of State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors (NASADAD)

Partnership to End Addiction

Shatterproof

Treatment Communities of America (TCA)

Young People in Recovery (YPR)

June 2, 2021

Honorable Patty Murray  
Chair, Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions  
154 Russell Senate Office Bldg.  
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Richard Burr, Ranking Member  
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions  
217 Russell Senate Office Bldg.  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Murray and Ranking Member Burr:

The undersigned disability rights, mental health, and peer advocacy organizations write to express our support for confirmation of Miriam E. Delphin-Rittmon, President Biden's nominee for Assistant Secretary of Mental Health and Substance Use. Together, our organizations represent millions of individuals with disabilities, including Americans living with mental health and substance use disabilities.

Dr. Delphin-Rittmon is an excellent choice for Assistant Secretary. She has a wide range of experience qualifying her to serve in this leadership role, including experience running a state mental health and substance use recovery service system; serving as a senior advisor to the Administrator of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA); conducting and evaluating research on a broad array of topics with a particular focus on culturally competent mental health services, racial, ethnic and cultural disparities, and peer support; and serving as Associate Professor with the Yale School of Medicine's Department of Psychiatry.

Over the past 20 years, Dr. Delphin-Rittmon has been a staunch advocate for recovery-oriented, community-based services. She oversaw the renewal of Connecticut's Medicaid home and community-based services waiver for individuals with psychiatric disabilities—one of only a small handful of HCBS waivers in the country focusing on individuals with psychiatric disabilities.

Under Dr. Delphin-Rittmon, Connecticut's community-based waiver has expanded access to a range of community services including peer support, supported employment, recovery assistance supports and other services that have helped countless individuals with psychiatric disabilities succeed in their communities of choice and avoid institutionalization.

Of paramount importance to disability rights and mental health advocacy organizations, she has been a strong advocate for improved engagement strategies and person-centered, recovery-oriented services rather than coercive practices.

Dr. Delphin-Rittmon guided Connecticut's mental health and substance use service system through the pandemic, overseeing a rapid transformation in operations and shift to telehealth services.

She has led innovative responses to the opioid crisis, including the deployment of peer recovery coaches in emergency departments and mobile vans with harm reduction supplies and wellness resources. The peer recovery coaches work in 25 emergency departments across Connecticut; they have lived experience with substance use challenges and engage with individuals with possible substance use diagnoses to offer assistance and referrals for services.

Now is the time to have a champion of equity in mental health and substance use policies and services. Dr. Delphin-Rittmon has devoted much of her career to addressing racial, ethnic and cultural disparities in mental health and substance use recovery services and advancing health equity and culturally appropriate services.

She has served as the Director of Cultural Competence and Health Disparities Research and Consultation at Yale's Program for Recovery and Community Health, served as Director of the Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services' (DMHAS) Office of Multicultural Affairs and worked as a consultant on that office's Health Disparities Initiative.

Dr. Delphin-Rittmon has also served on DMHAS's Multicultural Advisory Council, held leadership positions in the National Leadership Council on African American Behavioral Health, and served as a faculty member, a mentor, and a member of the training advisory committee for the American Psychological Association's Minority Fellowship Program. She has been involved with numerous research studies concerning cultural competence and the impact of racial bias and stereotyping on clinical judgment.

We urge that Dr. Delphin-Rittmon's nomination be moved forward and that she be swiftly confirmed. We stand ready to work with her to advance the health, recovery, rights and full inclusion of Americans with disabilities.

Sincerely,

American Association of People with Disabilities

Arizona Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Practitioners

Autistic Self Advocacy Network

Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law

California Association of Social Rehabilitation Agencies



The Coelho Center for Disability Law, Policy, and Innovation

Honorable Tony Coelho

College for Behavioral Health Leadership

Connecticut Legal Rights Project

Connecticut Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association

Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund

Faces and Voices of Recovery

Florida Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association

Georgia Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association

Gould Farm

Human Services Research Institute

Keep the Promise Coalition (CT)

Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute

Mental Health Connecticut

National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities Directors

National Association for Rights Protection and Advocacy

National Association for Rural Mental Health

National Coalition for Mental Health Recovery

National Council on Independent Living

National Disability Institute

New Jersey Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association

New York Association for Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services

Pennsylvania Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services

Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association

Psychosocial Rehabilitation Association of New Mexico

RespectAbility

Technical Assistance Collaborative

Tennessee Mental Health Consumers' Association

Virginia Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association



May 30, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chair  
U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr  
Ranking Member  
U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senators Murray and Burr,

It is with great respect and positive regard that I recommend Miriam E. Delphin-Rittmon, Ph.D. to be Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use. I have known Dr. Delphin-Rittmon for over 20 years, and can attest to her work as a researcher, community psychologist and as the Commissioner for Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. She is a kind, patient and thoughtful individual, with a true dedication to service.

Dr. Delphin-Rittmon is acutely aware of the stress and struggles of people who live with mental illness, poverty and exposure to violence. Working in New Haven during her earlier career as a community psychologist, Dr. Delphin-Rittmon had a great awareness of the systems for mental health that need transformation and repair. Dr. Delphin-Rittmon has, throughout her career, been committed to promoting recovery oriented, integrated, and culturally responsive services and systems that foster dignity, respect, and meaningful community inclusion. Dr. Delphin-Rittmon assumed her DHMAS Commissioner role in 2015, and since then has worked hard to transform the mental health system to create access and treatment for those living with mental health and with substance abuse and in particular Opioid abuse. Her work leading the roll out of care for individuals addicted to Opioids has been exemplary and nationally recognized. She built this system with great input from the citizens of CT, making efforts to learn and listen to the community to guide system design.

Dr. Delphin-Rittmon has worked closely with the federal government, she currently serves on the SAMHSA Advisory Committee for Women's Services. In May 2014, Dr. Delphin-Rittmon completed a two-year White House appointment working as a Senior Advisor to the Administrator of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. While at SAMHSA, she worked on a range of policy initiatives addressing behavioral health equity, workforce development, and healthcare reform. Her ability to know what the needs and stress points are within communities informs all of her policy work. I highly recommend Dr. Miriam E. Delphin-Rittmon, as a capable and qualified candidate for this important position. Please feel free to contact me if you would like to discuss further.

Sincerely,

Alice Forrester, PhD  
CEO, Clifford Beers



**State of Connecticut**  
**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
 STATE CAPITOL  
 HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106-1591

**REPRESENTATIVE CATHERINE F. ABERCROMBIE**  
 EIGHTY-THIRD ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

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 TOLL FREE: (800) 842-1902  
 E-Mail: Catherine.Abercrombie@cga.ct.gov

**CHAIR**  
 HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE  
**MEMBER**  
 APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

May 24, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray  
 Chair  
 U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions  
 Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr  
 Ranking Member  
 U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions  
 Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Murray and Senator Burr,

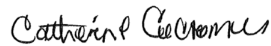
It gives me tremendous pleasure to write this letter of wholehearted support for Dr. Miriam Delphin-Rittmon's nomination to be the next Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Abuse at the Department of Health and Human Services. She is phenomenal leader and advocate, and if she is confirmed, Connecticut's loss will most surely be the country's gain.

I have had the great fortune to know Dr. Delphin-Rittmon over many years, as we are both proud residents of Meriden, Connecticut. I have watched as her career in public service has gone from strength to strength. She possesses the ideal qualifications to take on this new role, as she has an enormous depth of experience on the local, state and national levels, and understands the intersections of their functions. Dr. Delphin-Rittmon also brings her perspective as an eminently respected academic researcher and teacher; someone who has published widely, comprehensively addressing many of the most crucial current issues in behavioral health. She views and understands policy implications with both a micro and macro lens, and she is a true innovator in strengthening public services through increasing efficiency, flexibility and quality of person-centered care. Dr. Delphin-Rittmon is a highly effective collaborator, who works with multiple branches of government and stakeholders to create optimal outcomes. She understands the complexities of managing a large organization, which engages in multiple service modalities in both the public and private sectors. She does all of this with exceptional grace and warmth.

There is no greater champion for health equity than Dr. Delphin-Rittmon. Her passion for increasing cultural competency has profoundly altered the landscape of behavioral health care in Connecticut. She has been a peerless leader in combatting the opioid crisis, and she has made significant contributions to the ongoing work of suicide prevention. I also had the honor of working closely with Dr. Delphin-Rittmon throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, and saw firsthand the impact of her thoughtful, proactive leadership during the most uncertain and unsettling of times. Her clear-headed approach made all the difference, as she successfully navigated the truly unprecedented challenges her agency faced as a result of the pandemic.

Dr. Delphin-Rittmon brings a wealth of practical and academic experience, and an ongoing commitment to serve the people of this country, always honoring their autonomy and dignity. She will continue to lead with insight, conviction and a cooperative spirit, and I know she will continue to make Connecticut proud. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can provide any additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Catherine Abercrombie". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'C'.

Catherine Abercrombie  
State Representative  
83<sup>rd</sup> District



The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chair  
U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr  
Ranking Member  
U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Honorable Patty Murray & Honorable Richard Burr,

I am writing on behalf of The Connecticut Alliance of Recovery Residences (CTARR).

CTARR is a 501c3 non-profit located in Connecticut. Our mission is to support recovery residences in CT to practice national quality standards for recovery residences. CTARR inspects and certifies CT Recovery Home, provides training and maintains a forum for exchanging ideas, solving problems, and to act as an advocate for our members as well as those we serve. We, here at CTARR are the only National Alliance of Recovery Residences affiliate for the state of Connecticut.

Without hesitation we at CTARR would like to support Dr. Miriam Delphin-Rittmon to serve as Assistant Secretary of HHS.

As the Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, Dr. Delphin-Rittmon, Ph.D., managed a large healthcare agency comprised of 13 local mental health authorities statewide, two state hospitals (Connecticut Valley Hospital and Whiting Forensic Hospital) and 160 community private nonprofit providers and she has served in this role since 2015 working tirelessly for Connecticut residents

Dr. Delphin-Rittmon has guided the department through the pandemic, rapidly transforming agency operations in order to maintain core services.

While performing all of her daily schedule tasks, Dr. Delphin-Rittmon always makes time to work with local agencies to ensure we stay on the forefront of the epidemic keeping Connecticut as thought leaders in this industry. She is a strong advocate for recovery and the work we do at CTARR.

Again, CTARR fully supports Dr. Miriam Delphin-Rittmon to serve as the Assistant Secretary of HHS.

Sincerely,

*Daniel Smith*

Dan Smith – President – Connecticut Alliance of Recovery Residences

*Karen Ablondi*

Karen Ablondi- Vice President – Connecticut Alliance of Recovery Residences

Yale University

David A. Fiellin, M.D.  
 Professor of Medicine, Emergency  
 Medicine and Public Health  
 Director, Program in Addiction Medicine  
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May 21, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray  
 Chair  
 U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions  
 Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr  
 Ranking Member  
 U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions  
 Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairwoman Murray and Ranking Member Burr:

I am writing to express my enthusiastic support for Dr. Miriam Delphin-Rittmon to be the Assistant Secretary of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and request that her confirmation be expedited. I am Professor of Medicine and Public Health at Yale School of Medicine and Director of the Yale Program in Addiction Medicine. I have known Dr. Delphin-Rittmon for 15 years and have worked closely with her since 2016 when I led the Connecticut Opioid Response Strategic Plan at the request of Governor Malloy. I have also participated in the Connecticut Alcohol and Drug Policy Council of which she was co-Chair. Based on these collaborations and observations I believe I am well qualified to speak of the excellence that Dr. Delphin-Rittmon brings to the field of substance use and mental health. I believe Dr. Delphin-Rittmon's 20-year career in the behavioral health field and her experience in overseeing the design, evaluation and administration of substance use and mental health programs in Connecticut and nationally make her eminently qualified for this position.

Dr. Delphin-Rittmon, Ph.D., is a clinical community psychologist who has extensive experience managing complex health care systems. Dr. Delphin-Rittmon is committed to promoting recovery oriented, integrated, and culturally responsive services and systems that foster dignity, respect, and meaningful community inclusion. As the Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, Dr. Delphin-Rittmon, Ph.D., manages a large healthcare agency comprised of 13 local mental health authorities statewide, two state hospitals and 160 community private nonprofit providers.

In all of my interactions with Dr. Delphin-Rittmon I have found her to be thoughtful, receptive, attentive, consensus-minded and task oriented. Dr. Miriam Delphin-Rittmon, Ph.D., takes a collaborative approach to addressing the state's substance use mental health challenges and

delivering solutions. She is particularly adept at working with varied stakeholders including individuals and families, community organizations, and large stakeholder groups.

In short, Dr. Delphin-Rittmon has the outstanding leadership skills that are necessary to provide strong leadership to SAMHSA as it continues to address the impact of substance use and mental illness our country. I enthusiastically support the nomination of Dr. Miriam Delphin-Rittmon as Assistant Secretary of SAMHSA. I look forward to her speedy confirmation. Thank you for considering my views.

Sincerely,



David A. Fiellin, M.D.  
Director, Yale Program in Addiction Medicine  
Professor of Medicine, Emergency Medicine and Public Health  
Yale School of Medicine



George S. Logan

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chair  
U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr  
Ranking Member  
U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Subject: Miriam Delphin-Rittmon, PhD - Recommendation Letter

To The Honorable Patty Murray and The Honorable Richard Burr –

I have known Dr. Miriam Delphin-Rittmon since the fall of 2018. At the time, I was the Connecticut State Senator representing the 17<sup>th</sup> Senatorial District which includes Ansonia, Beacon Falls, Bethany, Derby, Hamden, Naugatuck and Woodbridge. At that time, substance use, the opioid epidemic, behavior and mental health conditions associated with these issues continued to worsen with each passing day, month and year. More and more of my constituents expressed to me concern for their loved ones. For various reasons, as the substance use epidemic worsened, the public remained behind the curve in terms of awareness of the crisis. Many individuals and families were surprised when they themselves, a close family member, a friend or a co-worker was affected either directly or indirectly by the developing epidemic. As I looked for ways I could help make the situation better for those affected by substance use, behavioral and mental health conditions, many expressed to me that they were desperate for help. This is where I saw true leadership from Commissioner Delphin-Rittmon as she worked many small miracles on a regular basis, with the limited resources as she did all she could to help others.

Aside from all of her experience as a public health / mental health care professional, Commissioner Delphin-Rittmon is always eager to listen and learn from others. She always conducts herself in a professional manner and has the ability to be effective, even within the sometimes partisan environment at the Connecticut State Capitol. She is reliable and consistent in her committed to solving issues related to behavior health, the opioid crisis, and the current COVID-19 pandemic. She is a friend to many and a confidant to a diverse group of individuals. Dr. Miriam Delphin-Rittmon has a solid professional foundation and has demonstrated excellent people interaction skills. She has a keen awareness of her surroundings and knows how to rely on her experience which she couples with good common sense.

Commissioner Delphin-Rittmon has been effective in helping and connecting with people from different Connecticut community circles to understand where to best focus efforts towards services and programs related to treatment, housing, transportation, public education, health equity, work force development, legal assistance, alcohol and drug policy, etc. Her efforts to eliminate the stigma associated with excessive substance use and illicit drug abuse via the statewide awareness campaign has helped numerous families and individuals -and I would argue helped save lives.

The State of Connecticut and our nation still has a long way to travel before we can claim victories in the battles associated with the lack of public awareness and proper treatment for behavior and mental health issues. I believe great leadership, along with effective actions and impactful changes as demonstrated by Commissioner Delphin-Rittmon here in Connecticut will transfer well on the national stage. Whether it is working with elected officials, other public health directors/professional or teaching and mentoring young people or up-and-coming professionals, Dr. Miriam Delphin-Rittmon is highly regarded in her field and among her peers in both Connecticut's public health, legislative and non-profit/NGO communities.

Personally, I will never forget her participation in the various activities and events I hosted to help in the statewide effort to call attention to various behavioral and mental health issues. From the two district-wide public/community forums my staff and I coordinated in Hamden-CT and Naugatuck-CT to hear from the public and discuss potential solutions to behavioral health issue related to the Opioid Crisis; to my four Annual Senior Health and Wellness Fairs; as well as multiple other meetings and events that either I attended or participated in - that were related to mental health and addiction services; Commissioner Delphin-Rittmon was often present to represent the state's efforts to listen to the public, collaborate with public health / mental health professionals and legislators, as we all work towards making real and sustainable solutions to behavioral health issues and addiction a governmental priority.

Dr. Miriam Delphin-Rittmon's experience, strong leadership skills, excellent people skills, and empathy make her worthy of consideration to fill your organization's needs. Commissioner Delphin-Rittmon is knowledgeable and sincere. I hope only the best for her. She is intelligent and has the discipline to excel in anything she wishes to accomplish. Dr. Delphin-Rittmon is a hard-working, compassionate, and multi faceted individual that would be an asset to any organization.

I am positive that Dr. Miriam Delphin-Rittmon will excel as Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use with the U.S Department of Health and Human Services. Her involvement with the organization will be mutually beneficial to all involved. It is a pleasure and an honor to write this overwhelmingly supportive letter of recommendation.

Please feel free to contact me if you would like to discuss further.

Respectfully submitted,



George S. Logan

c: Miriam Delphine-Rittmon, PhD



State of Connecticut  
**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
 STATE CAPITOL  
 HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106-1591

**REPRESENTATIVE JONATHAN STEINBERG**

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**CHAIR**  
 PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE  
**MEMBER**  
 ENERGY & TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE  
 TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

The Honorable Patty Murray  
 Chair  
 U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions  
 Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr  
 Ranking Member  
 U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions  
 Washington, D.C. 20510

Esteemed Senators:

I offer my enthusiastic support of Dr. Miriam Delphin-Rittmon's candidacy to serve as Assistant Secretary of Health and Human Services.

As House Chair of the Connecticut Legislature's Public Health Committee, I have worked closely with Dr. Delphin-Rittmon for many years in her role as Commissioner of the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. She is an accomplished professional with deep subject knowledge and an ability to navigate the often challenging political landscape.

I'd particularly like to note her leadership regarding ongoing issues at the Whiting Forensic Hospital, a high-security facility with longstanding physical plant and staffing concerns. In the face of highly emotional and controversial assertions made by unions and resident representatives, Dr. Delphin-Rittmon maintained a constructive and forthright approach to conflict resolution. She kept her focus on seeking genuine solutions to systemic problems, not getting caught up in political agendas.

We have also worked collaboratively on several pressing issues such as opioid dependency, mental and behavioral health access and funding, and suicide prevention. Ongoing fiscal deficits meant that she was often making due with woefully insufficient funding. She really never complains or passes the buck! I have always found her to be open-minded, sincere and inclusive, particularly in understanding varying points of view and lived experiences.

She also played an important role in the Legislature's efforts to mitigate nicotine addiction from youth vaping. Her department's contribution was critical in shaping the legislation. You couldn't have a more reliable and determined partner in attempting to tackle the toughest policy issues!

The role for which she is being considered is extremely important to our nation. I have every confidence that Dr. Delphin-Rittmon will serve our country with dedication and distinction. My only regret is that we will miss her here in Connecticut!

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Steinberg  
 State Representative, 136<sup>th</sup> District  
 Connecticut General Assembly



**State of Connecticut**  
**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
STATE CAPITOL  
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106-1591

**REPRESENTATIVE MARIA HORN**  
64TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

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E-MAIL: Maria.Horn@cga.ct.gov

May 28, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chair  
U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr  
Ranking Member  
U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Murray and Ranking Member Burr,

I have the great privilege of writing today in support of the nomination of Dr. Miriam Delphin-Rittmon, Ph.D. for Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use.

Dr. Delphin-Rittmon's qualifications are prodigious, both in terms of her experience managing complex health care systems and in rethinking systems of care with innovation and skill.

My first and abiding impression of Dr. Delphin-Rittmon is that she is always listening, with attention, curiosity, and compassion. She brings her extensive experience and expertise to every conversation, always making a point to understand another perspective before adding her own. Her deft ability to manage emotionally charged situations and respond with data-driven responses is especially valuable in her field.

As Co-Chair of the Public Safety and Security Committee, and as a community member with a deep commitment to addressing issues relating to addiction and mental health issues, I am very proud to support Dr. Delphin-Rittmon for this position, and happy to speak further should that be helpful to you. Thank you.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Maria Horn'.

Maria Horn  
64<sup>th</sup> Assembly District

**CO- CHAIR**  
PUBLIC SAFETY & SECURITY COMMITTEE

**MEMBER**  
ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE  
ENERGY & TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE

June 7, 2021

Senator Patty Murray  
Chairwoman,  
Committee on Health,  
Education, Labor and Pensions  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Richard Burr  
Ranking Member,  
Committee on Health, Education, Labor  
and Pensions  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Murray and Ranking Member Burr,

On behalf of the undersigned nation's leading mental health, addiction, and well-being advocacy groups, we write to express our strong support for the nomination of Dr. Miriam E. Delphin-Rittmon for Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The Assistant Secretary will play a key role in coordinating the federal government's initiatives to address the serious mental health and substance use challenges currently facing our country; we therefore encourage a prompt confirmation so we can begin to work together as soon as possible to address these challenges.

The Mental Health Liaison Group (MHLG) is a coalition of organizations representing consumers, family members, mental health and addiction providers, advocates, payers, and other stakeholders committed to strengthening Americans' access to mental health and addiction care. As trusted leaders in the field, our 70+ member organizations are dedicated to elevating the national conversation around mental health and addiction. Together, we work to advance federal policies that support prevention, early intervention, treatment, and recovery services and supports.

The COVID-19 pandemic has magnified many of our nation's most neglected issues, most notably our widespread mental health crisis. More than [26 million individuals](#) are experiencing mental illness without access to treatment, and every year thousands of Americans overdose and die from the opioid epidemic. We need a passionate and experienced public health leader at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to spearhead national efforts to reduce the impact of substance abuse and mental illness on America's communities.

Dr. Delphin-Rittmon has established herself as that capable leader in the mental health and addiction space throughout her distinguished career. She is a public health expert with over 20 years of experience in the mental health and addiction field at the local, state, and national levels. Over the span of her career, she has become an expert at designing, evaluating, and administering mental health, substance use, and prevention services across systems. As a clinical psychologist, she holds a faculty appointment in the Yale Department of Psychiatry and has published several peer-reviewed research publications on a range of issues such as exploring ethnic differences in coping and help-seeking behavior and assessing the impact of race and stereotyping biases on the clinical judgment process. Her

experience and expertise on mental health issues from both a policy and research perspective make her the ideal candidate to lead SAMHSA.

Further, Dr. Delphin-Rittmon currently serves as the Commissioner of the Connecticut State Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, a position she was appointed to in 2015. In this role, she has demonstrated her commitment to meaningful community inclusion, culturally responsive services, and a recovery-oriented approach. She has managed a multimillion-dollar budget, thousands of employees, and led the department through the COVID pandemic; rapidly transforming their agency operations in order to maintain core services for the 110,000 individuals they serve. Dr. Delphin-Rittmon has been instrumental in securing grants targeting women's services, recovery, the opioid crisis, suicide prevention, Hurricane Maria, and the behavioral impact of the pandemic. She also co-chaired Connecticut's Alcohol and Drug Policy Council that guided many opioid crisis interventions, including the introduction of a recovery coach program that served as a model for federal legislation.

Prior to serving as Commissioner, Dr. Delphin-Rittmon completed a two-year appointment at the White House, where she worked as the Senior Advisor to the Administrator of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. In this position, Dr. Delphin-Rittmon was involved in a wide variety of policy efforts focused on equitable behavioral health, workforce development, and mental healthcare reform. Since her tenure at SAMHSA, she has received multiple commendations for her work in the field, including the 2019 State Service Award from the National Association of State Drug and Alcohol Directors and the 2016 Mental Health Award for Excellence from the United Nations Committee on Mental Health.

On top of her strong resume, Dr. Delphin-Rittmon is widely known in the field as a leader of integrity who brings a strong sense of compassion to all her work. We are eager to begin working with her to ensure all Americans have access to vital mental health support and substance use recovery. The undersigned MHLG organizations strongly endorse Dr. Delphin-Rittmon's nomination for Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use.

Sincerely,

American Academy of Child and  
Adolescent Psychiatry

American Association for Marriage and  
Family Therapy

American Association for Psychoanalysis in  
Clinical Social Work

American Dance Therapy Association

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

American Mental Health Counselors  
Association

American Occupational Therapy  
Association

American Psychiatric Association

American Psychological Association

American Society of Addiction Medicine

Anxiety and Depression Association of  
America

Association for Ambulatory Behavioral  
Healthcare

Association for Behavioral Health and  
Wellness

Association Of Community Mental Health  
Authorities of Illinois

BasicNeeds US  
 Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law  
 Centerstone  
 Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD)  
 Children's Mental Health Network  
 Clinical Social Work Association  
 College of Psychiatric and Neurologic Pharmacists (CPNP)  
 Crisis Residential Association  
 Crisis Text Line  
 DBHIDS  
 Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance  
 Eating Disorders Coalition  
 Education Development Center  
 Geriatric Psychiatry Clinic  
 Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice  
 Inseperable  
 International Certification & Reciprocity Consortium  
 Mental Health America  
 NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals  
 NACBHDD  
 NARMH  
 National Alliance on Mental Illness  
 National Association for Children's Behavioral Health  
 National Association of Addiction Treatment Providers  
 National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners  
 National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors  
 National Council for Mental Wellbeing  
 National League for Nursing  
 New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies, Inc.  
 NHMH - No Health w/o Mental Health  
 Postpartum Support International  
 REDC Consortium  
 RI International, Inc.  
 SMART Recovery  
 The American Counseling Association  
 The Jed Foundation  
 The Kennedy Forum  
 The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health  
 The National Council for Mental Wellbeing  
 The Trevor Project  
 Treatment Communities of America  
 Vibrant Emotional Health  
 Well Being Trust

**SENATOR MARILYN MOORE**

*Twenty-second District*

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**State of Connecticut**  
**SENATE**

**DEPUTY PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE**

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Human Services;  
General Bonding  
Vice Chair  
Finance, Revenue & Bonding  
Member  
Children  
Executive & Legislative Nominations;  
Legislative Management;  
Public Health

May 25, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chair  
U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Murray,

It is with pleasure that I write this letter on behalf of Miriam Delphin-Rittmon, Ph.D., Connecticut State Commissioner Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS). Her nomination to serve as Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in the Biden Administration is a much-deserved honor.

My relationship with Commissioner Delphin-Rittmon did not begin with my role as a Connecticut State Senator, as an Executive Director who implemented a researched based health project in Connecticut, I have observed her for more than 20 years in various health roles and she has served Connecticut in a stellar manner supporting and implementing policy and programs.

Dr. Delphin-Rittmon has served as CT Commissioner of DMHAS since 2015, coming after a two-year appointment under President Barack Obama as senior policy advisor to the administrator of SAMHSA, where she worked on policy initiatives addressing behavioral health equity, workforce development, and healthcare reform.

As an advisor on issues such as the opioid crisis and the increasing mental health needs of our communities following COVID-19, Commissioner Delphin-Rittmon has been invaluable to Connecticut. Thanks to her leadership Connecticut has moved forward in accessibility to mental health services.

Governor Ned Lamont recently said, "Commissioner Delphin-Rittmon has been a trusted advisor on some of the leading issues of our time, especially when it comes to the national impact of the opioid crisis and the growing mental health needs of our community following the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic."

As Dr. Delphin-Rittmon embark on her new journey it is with gratitude and excitement that I say well done and continued success.

Sincerely,

Marilyn Moore





## City of New London

181 State Street • New London, CT 06320 • Phone (860) 447-5201 • Fax (860) 447-7971

May 24, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chair  
U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Honorable Patty Murray,

My name is Jeanne Milstein. I am the Director of Human Services for the City of New London and the former Child Advocate for the State of Connecticut.

It is an honor and a pleasure to write this letter of recommendation for Dr. Miriam Delphin-Rittmon. President Biden could not have selected a better person to become the Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Abuse, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Dr. Delphin-Rittmon has a long and distinguished career in public service dedicated to children, youth, adults and families in the state of Connecticut and in Washington, D.C. Her career spans almost three decades and has touched the lives of thousands of people. Dr. Delphin-Rittmon has been instrumental in shaping Connecticut public policy on many important issues such as mental health, the opioid crisis and access to quality, on demand services and supports for the most vulnerable.

In the five years I have had the privilege to work with Commissioner Delphin-Rittmon, I have been amazed with her energy, commitment, vision, and her ability to implement and bring diverse groups of people together. She is available to families, children, youth, adults, policymakers, first responders, municipal leaders to listen, advocate and bring about reform and change. She is deeply committed to breaking down barriers for those with mental health issues, substance use disorder, domestic violence, individuals in the criminal justice system, the homeless and many more. Dr. Delphin-Rittmon has demonstrated tremendous commitment to working to promote necessary reform in partnership with government leaders, public agencies, private providers and community professionals, advocacy groups and private citizens.

I have worked closely with Commissioner Delphin-Rittmon on the opioid crisis. She has been tremendously supportive of our CARES (Coordinated Access, Resources, Engagement and Support) model that has been implemented in New London for those suffering from opioid use disorder. One of the most important aspects of the CARES model which is now nationally recognized is that the navigators, who themselves have experience substance use disorder, develop a trusting relationship with those they serve. Dr. Delphin-Rittmon is rigorous and holds us accountable for results.

Dr. Delphin-Rittmon and her team have guided the City of New London as we implement a public safety/mental health mode for policing, changing the current paradigm. The City will be replicating the navigator model and will collaborate with existing Mobile Crisis services administered by Commissioner Delphin-Rittman. We are grateful to her for supporting and recognizing our efforts.

During her tenure as Commissioner of the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services she has shown compassion, support and advocacy regarding people who use drugs. Her concerned leadership resonates with all of us who are trying to educate our communities about substance use disorder. My city has benefited directly from her work to promote efforts to eradicate opioid use disorder and to respect the lives of individuals living with the disease. Most importantly of all, Dr. Delphin-Rittmon is kind, gives people voice and is always available.

I urge your support of her nomination. She will be making a difference in countless numbers of lives. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need additional information.

Sincerely,

Jeanne Milstein  
Director, Human Services, City of New London



The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chair  
U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr  
Ranking Member  
U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions  
Washington, D.C. 20510

May 31, 2021

Dear Senator Murray and Senator Burr,

On behalf of Shatterproof, a national nonprofit organization dedicated to reversing the addiction crisis in the United States, I am writing to support the application of Dr. Miriam Delphine-Rittmon for her nomination to serve as Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. She is a qualified choice with a proven track record as a life-long public servant who has used the intersection of policy and program to change lives.

Dr. Delphin-Rittmon, Ph. D, is a clinical community Psychologist with experience managing complex health care systems. She is committed to promoting recovery oriented, integrated, and culturally responsive services and systems that foster dignity, respect, and meaningful community inclusion. As the Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, Dr. Delphin-Rittmon, Ph.D., managed a large healthcare agency comprised of 13 local mental health authorities statewide, two state hospitals and 160 community private nonprofit providers. The department serves 110,000 individuals annually, has approximately 3,200 employees, and an operating budget of about \$719,000,000. In 2020, she successfully and skillfully guided the department through the pandemic, pivoting when COVID hit and transforming agency operations to maintain essential services.

In her role serving the people of Connecticut's mental health needs, she increased access to care by implementing a dedicated toll-free Access Line available 24/7, 365 days a year to refer callers to appropriate levels of care and arranges for transportation when necessary. Additionally, As the Co-Chair the Alcohol and Drug Policy Council – a body comprised of representatives from all three branches of State government, consumer and advocacy groups, private providers, and individuals in recovery from addiction – Dr. Delphin Rittmon, led work to generate and track implementation of recommendations associated with opioid use disorder and other substances. These are just a few of lengthy accomplishments that make her unequivocally qualified for this important position.

I should state that Shatterproof is based in Norwalk, Connecticut and I am a lifelong Connecticut resident, so I am recommending her after seeing her work implemented and benefiting my home state. On a personal note, a few years ago I spoke just after Dr. Miriam Delphine-Rittmon at a conference in Connecticut, and in addition



to her extremely qualified background, the passion in her eyes as she spoke meant the world to those in the audience. I am honored to be speaking alongside her.

We strongly support the candidacy of Dr. Miriam Delphine-Rittmon for the vital role of Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

We look forward to her timely confirmation and working with her in the near future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gary Mendell".

Gary Mendell  
Founder & CEO, Shatterproof

YALE UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE  
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHIATRY

JOHN H. KRISTAL, M.D.  
Chair, Department of Psychiatry  
Chief of Psychiatry and Behavioral Health,  
Yale-New Haven Hospital  
Co-Director, Yale Center for Clinical Investigation  
Director, Clinical Neuroscience Division,  
National Center for PTSD

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Department of Psychiatry  
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New Haven, Connecticut 06511  
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Fax: 203-785-6196  
Email: john.krystal@yale.edu

May 24, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chair  
U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Murray,

I am pleased to write to strongly endorse the candidacy of Miriam E. Delphin-Rittmon, Ph.D. for the position of Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use for the Department of Health and Human Services.

My credentials to comment on her candidacy are as follows. Since 2009, I have chaired the Yale Department of Psychiatry and the Psychiatry Services of Yale-New Haven Hospital (YNHH). I also co-lead the Yale Center for Clinical Investigation (2019-present), the NIAAA Center for the Translational Research on Alcoholism (2000-present), and the Clinical Neuroscience Division of the National Center for PTSD of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (1999-present). I currently co-lead the Forum on Neuroscience and Nervous Disorders of the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine and I have served in senior advisory roles for the National Institute of Mental Health, National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Department of Defense (Defense Health Board, Psychiatry Subcommittee).

Miriam has an exemplary track record of leading programs that serve the needs of those struggling with chronic and disabling mental illnesses and addictions. I have followed her career since she arrived at the Yale Department of Psychiatry in 2002 for post-doctoral training. Her initial work focused on two key areas: the need for cultural competence among those delivering mental health services and the development of services to address disparities in access to services and in mental health outcomes in minoritized populations. Since 2018, she has held the rank of associate professor (adjunct) on our faculty. Her work was highly relevant to the mission of the Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS). From 2012-2014, she served as a Senior Advisor to the Administrator of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

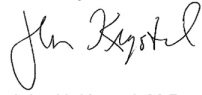
Miriam has been an able and effective Commissioner for DMHAS since 2015. DMHAS serves 110,000 people via 13 local mental health authorities, two large state hospitals and 160 community private nonprofit providers. She has created a system that more efficiently manages

its resources, provides improved pathways for access to treatment (24/7 Access Line), better engages community stakeholders in identifying and addressing treatment needs, created a mobile medication treatment program to improve outreach, created and expanded recovery-oriented programs (such as peer support), and advanced DEI initiatives. Further, she has led or co-chaired statewide initiatives to address the opioid crisis and, most importantly, effectively led DMHAS through the COVID pandemic.

Miriam is not only a skilled leader, but also a wonderful collaborator. Other than DMHAS, Yale and its affiliated institutions are the largest provider of mental health services in Connecticut. Miriam and I work together on a large range of issues that span ways to optimize the interface of YNHH and DMHAS to the effort to develop new and more effective treatments to address mental illness-related disability. I find that she has a broad vision, that she is a good listener, and a creative innovator. In summary, I think that Miriam Delphin-Rittmon, Ph.D. is an outstanding candidate for the Assistant Secretary position. I have attached a copy of her CV and biosketch to provide more background information.

I would be pleased to address any questions related to this letter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John Krystal".

John H. Krystal, M.D.  
Robert L. McNeil, Jr. Professor of Translational Research  
Professor of Psychiatry, Neuroscience, and Psychology



*Improving  
Behavioral Health Services  
for Women*

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[www.womensconsortium.org](http://www.womensconsortium.org)

May 27, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chair  
U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Senator Patty Murray,

I am writing today to urge you to confirm Commissioner Delphin-Rittmon as Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services with the unequivocal haste befitting her standout status.

Commissioner Delphin-Rittmon has led the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services for the majority of my nine-year tenure as Executive Director of the Connecticut Women's Consortium. As the leader of a DMHAS-funded non-profit, I have worked closely with the Commissioner to meet the needs of Connecticut's behavioral health workforce and the communities they serve. The Commissioner, not one to ignore systemic disparities, has prioritized women's services, recovery, the opioid crisis, suicide prevention, and pandemic relief — all culminating in an exemplary and meaningful expansion of DMHAS' statewide presence. I can think of no person better suited to lead the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration as the Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use.

When Commissioner Delphin-Rittmon accepted her current role, the Women's Services Division at DMHAS was in disarray. Half-staffed and limited by an undercut funding system, the department was unable to champion the thousands of women who relied on their relief. Through the Commissioner's leadership, the Women's Services Division has flourished, each year proving better and more ambitious than the last. My own organization has been blessed with supportive federal grants — a piece of the \$82 million the Commissioner has secured — which have empowered us to expand our training initiatives and help to build a better service system.

Commissioner Delphin-Rittmon has made her support of women and children clear through her work as co-chair of the Governor's Council on Women and Children's Subcommittee on Health and Safety. This Connecticut initiative seeks to connect advocates and service providers in conversation about the needs of women and children, how those needs are being met, and how they might be better addressed. As the leader of DMHAS, the Commissioner is entrusted with the awesome responsibility of coordinating the realities of budget, staffing, and other limitations with the formidable needs of those DMHAS serves. She has done so with grace and strength.

For the last year, the Consortium's own Community Programing and Development Lead, Kathleen Callahan has worked with Commissioner Delphin-Rittmon, Lt. Governor

Susan Bysiewicz, and Dita Bhargava to campaign against the opioid crisis and bring awareness to providers and clients alike. Their Opioid Round Tables have reached a countless number of residents in communities across the state. Impressive, but the Opioid Round Tables are just one in a series of the Commissioner's steps to address the opioid crisis. To prevent, discourage and destigmatize opioid addiction, the Commissioner launched the Live LOUD Campaign, a series of social media, radio, transit and billboard spots directed to those who are actively using heroin or misusing prescription opioids, their families and communities. I was personally able to witness the launch of this campaign at our 2019 Opioid Conference, which we hosted on DMHAS' behalf. The Commissioner has made ending the opioid crisis a clear priority and, as this emergency continues to threaten American lives, people like her are absolutely essential to SAMHSA.

The Commissioner's record supporting those in recovery, women, children, those effected by the opioid crisis, and all Connecticutans speaks for itself. Her service has been integral to the success of 13 local mental health authorities, two state hospitals, and 160 community private nonprofit providers. And, as she moves forward as Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use, her supportive reach will only grow. Please vote to confirm Commissioner Delphin-Rittmon and allow her to continue to serve those who need her most.

Sincerely,



Colette Anderson, LCSW

Executive Director

The Connecticut Women's Consortium

Cc: Carly Rush: [Carly\\_Rush@help.senate.gov](mailto:Carly_Rush@help.senate.gov)

Kelsey Mellette: [Kelsey.Mellette@hhs.gov](mailto:Kelsey.Mellette@hhs.gov)



May 6, 2021

*President*  
Cassandra Price  
Georgia

Senator Patty Murray  
154 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Richard Burr  
217 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

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Arlene González-Sánchez  
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*Vice President  
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*Region I*  
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*Region II*  
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*Region III*  
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*Region IV*  
Lori Criss, OH

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*Region VI*  
Shari Dawson, NE

*Region VII*  
Doug Thomas, UT

*Region VIII*  
Eddie Mersereau, HI

*Region IX*  
Michael Langer, WA

*Region X*

*Executive Director*  
Robert I. L. Morrison

Dear Chair Murray and Ranking Member Burr:

On behalf of the National Association of State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors (NASADAD), I am writing in support of the nomination of Dr. Miriam Delphin-Rittmon as the Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). We believe Dr. Delphin-Rittmon has the knowledge, skills, and experience necessary to lead the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

Since 2015, Dr. Delphin-Rittmon has served as Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS), managing the State's publicly funded substance use and mental health service delivery system. In her role as Commissioner, she has been a member of NASADAD and has served on the Association's Public Policy Committee, providing guidance on federal legislative and regulatory efforts to address addiction. She has helped other States learn about innovative practices in Connecticut, presenting at NASADAD's Annual Meeting on numerous occasions and hosting NASADAD staff for a series of site visits to local publicly funded substance use disorder providers. In recognition of her dedication to effective and equitable substance use services in Connecticut, she received the NASADAD State Service Award in 2019. In sum, Dr. Delphin-Rittmon has been an invaluable leader at both the State and national levels for many years.

Prior to serving as Commissioner, she served as DMHAS's Deputy Commissioner, Senior Policy Advisor, and the Director of the Department's Office of Multicultural Healthcare Equity. In May 2014, Dr. Delphin-Rittmon completed a two-year White House appointment working as a Senior Advisor to the Administrator of SAMHSA. In this role, she led numerous policy initiatives addressing health equity, workforce development, and healthcare reform.

Dr. Delphin-Rittmon received her B.A. in Social Science from Hofstra University, her M.S. and Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from Purdue University. She completed a postdoctoral fellowship in clinical community psychology at Yale University, and she currently serves as an Associate Adjunct Professor of Psychiatry at the Yale School of Medicine.

We strongly support the confirmation of Dr. Delphin-Rittmon to as Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use. We look forward to working with you as the nomination process moves forward.

Robert Morrison  
Executive Director  
National Association of State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors (NASADAD)





June 7, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chair  
Senate Committee on Health, Education,  
Labor and Pensions  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Health, Education,  
Labor and Pensions  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Murray and Ranking Member Burr:

On behalf of the American Public Health Association, a diverse community of public health professionals that champions the health of all people and communities, I write to express our support for the nomination of Dawn O'Connell as assistant secretary for preparedness and response for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. She has both the knowledge and experience to serve in this critical position, which will play an essential role in the nation's ongoing efforts to address the COVID-19 pandemic and the many other health security threats we face as a nation.

O'Connell currently serves as senior counselor to the secretary for COVID-19, where she coordinates the HHS response to the pandemic. Prior to joining the administration, she was the director of the U.S. office of the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness and Innovation, where she also served as the executive director for CEPI's Joint Coordination Group, a roundtable of institutional partners with a vested interest in the successful development and deployment of epidemic vaccines. She has extensive previous experience working at the federal level including serving as senior counselor to HHS Secretary Sylvia Burwell, advising the secretary on critical public health issues including the administration's response to Zika, Ebola, unaccompanied children and refugees.

We are confident that she has the leadership skills and experience needed to serve as assistant secretary for preparedness and response. We look forward to working with her and the many other dedicated staff at HHS and ASPR to address the critical public health challenges that we face as a nation. Please feel free to contact me with any questions regarding our support for her nomination.

Sincerely,

Georges C. Benjamin, MD  
Executive Director



June 4, 2021

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National Advocates for Asian  
American, Native Hawaiian &  
Pacific Islander Health

The Honorable Patty Murray, Chair  
Senate Health, Education, Labor, & Pensions Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr, Ranking Member  
Senate Health, Education, Labor, & Pensions Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

**RE: Letter in Support of the Nomination of Dawn O'Connell to be the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response at the US Department of Health and Human Services**

Dear Chairwoman Murray and Ranking Member Burr:

The Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum (APIAHF) strongly supports the nomination of Dawn O'Connell for the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response at the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

APIAHF is the nation's oldest and leading health policy organization working to advance the health and well-being of over 20 million Asian Americans, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islanders (AANHPIs) across the U.S. and territories. APIAHF works to improve access to and the quality of care for communities who are predominantly immigrant, many of whom are limited English proficient, and may be new to the U.S. healthcare system or unfamiliar with private or public coverage. We have longstanding relationships with over 150 community-based organizations across 40 states and the Pacific, to whom we provide capacity building, advocacy and technical assistance.

As our country faces an unprecedented public health crisis, AANHPI communities have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, facing high rates of infection, death and economic consequences. AANHPI communities have increased risk of adverse COVID-19 outcomes due to the burdens of chronic health conditions, multigenerational households, and a high proportion being essential workers both on the frontline and in service industries. At this critical moment, the country needs its leaders to prepare, respond and address disparities in communities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 and future crises – based on my experience working with Ms. O'Connell, I am confident that she is the right person to lead HHS's preparedness and response activities.

Throughout her career, Ms. O'Connell has demonstrated her focus on public service both in and out of government jobs. As a trusted advisor to Members of Congress and Cabinet officials, she has proven to be an experienced global

leader and diplomatic partner on global health issues and in her current role coordinating the Department-wide response to the pandemic. Ms. O'Connell has shown she has what it takes in this moment of unprecedented crisis and uncertainty.

Ms. O'Connell has both the requisite and substantive knowledge to serve as Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response. During the Obama administration, Ms. O'Connell showcased her exceptional leadership abilities in her role in the Obama administration's health and humanitarian response on past global epidemics, including the Ebola and Zika epidemics, addressing the needs of unaccompanied children, and protecting refugees -- working across the federal government, together with state and local governmental partners. Concurrently, she worked with international government leaders alongside federal and private sector partners to resolve key policy challenges that emerged, and lead implementation of efforts to overcome challenges and contain outbreaks before they escalated.

As director for the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness and Innovation, Ms. O'Connell has worked alongside the world's most experienced infectious disease, humanitarian, and public health experts to better prepare the world to address infectious disease outbreaks. She has unique experience in domestic and international preparedness to ensure the United States has the capacity to be a worldwide partner and leader in both immediate pandemic and epidemic response, as well as strategic planning to avoid and address future crises.

And critically, Ms. O'Connell recognizes the importance of inclusive preparedness and response efforts that leaves no communities behind. Her commitment to addressing racial equity is unquestioned, and I have confidence she will ensure, as she has always done, that communities of color, limited English proficient (LEP) and immigrant communities are not left out of the preparedness consideration and activities of the U.S. government as it responds to and prepares for health crises.

Ms. O'Connell is the right person to ensure that the United States and the rest of the world recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, carry out transparent coordination of widespread governmental efforts, and bring about a state of readiness and preparedness, for all communities, for the next public health crisis. For these reasons, APIAHF strongly urges the HELP Committee to swiftly report to the full Senate the appointment of Ms. O'Connell to the position of Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response of HHS.

Sincerely Yours,



Juliet K. Choi  
President & CEO

Cc: Kelsey Mellette



**Commissioned Officers Association**  
of the U.S. Public Health Service

June 7, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chairperson, Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr  
Ranking Member Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairperson Murry and Ranking Member Burr,

On behalf of the Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service, Inc. (COA) and I write to make clear our Association's strong and enthusiastic support for the nomination of Dawn O'Connell as the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). This outstanding nominee has crisis management experience that is both recent and highly relevant. It includes defining and leading our Nation's responses to unprecedented public health threats such as the spread of COVID-19.

At DHHS, which is the U.S. government's lead agency with regard to COVID-19, Ms. O'Connell serves as Senior Counselor to the DHHS Secretary. In this capacity, she oversees the Department-wide response to the pandemic. Before assuming this role, Ms. O'Connell served in a leadership capacity on the transition team of then-President-elect Joe Biden. Before joining the Biden team, Ms. O'Connell represented the United States as director of the U.S. office of the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness and Innovation (CEPI).

In our view, Dawn O'Connell will make an outstanding Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response. That is why we support her nomination without reservation. We thank you for the opportunity to make our support clear in the public record of this nominating process.

Sincerely,

*Lisa Tonrey*

Lisa Tonrey, RPh, MHA, PhC, FAPHA  
CAPT (ret), USPHA  
Chair, Legislative Affairs Committee

June 6, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chair  
Senate Health, Education, Labor, & Pensions Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr  
Ranking Member  
Senate Health, Education, Labor, & Pensions Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairwoman Murray and Senator Burr:

It's a privilege to write to you in support of Dawn O'Connell's nomination to lead HHS's Office of Preparedness and Response as its Assistant Secretary.

I was at HHS (as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Health and Director of the National Vaccine Program Office) when the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response was created. Until my departure in February 2017. I worked closely with each of the ASPRs on a range of issues from SARS, MERS, Ebola, Zika, pandemic influenza preparedness, antimicrobial resistance, and several urgent public health threats in between. I know what that job takes and know that Dawn O'Connell's domestic and global experience is well suited to lead it at a time when leadership matters most.

I know that because I worked closely with Dawn on many of these issues when she was Deputy Chief of Staff and Senior Counselor at HHS and continued to work with her over the past several years on global vaccine R&D preparedness in her role leading the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness and Innovation's (CEP) Washington Office and mine as President of Global Immunization at the Sabin Vaccine Institute.

From all these experiences I know that Dawn knows the system and knows that it takes a system to prepare for and respond to domestic and global public health threats. She has the organizational skills to manage complex, fast-moving situations and the people skills to handle these often-tense situations with grace and focus and always with one eye on the populations affected and the other on marshalling the expertise, experience and resources needed to accomplish the mission. She knows who to bring to the table and, like an orchestra conductor,

has the ability and insight to get each of the players to perform their best – and even with harmony.

For these reasons she was exactly the right person to coordinate HHS' complex response to the COVID-19 pandemic not only to coordinate the many moving pieces, but simultaneously as a student of the response to strengthen what's working and to find and fix what's not. It is both the execution of the task in front of her and her quality improvement mindset of building better systems that makes her the right person for this job right now.

I'm more than happy to tell you more but I know that the country would be well served with Dawn O'Connell as HHS' next ASPR.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bruce Gellin', is centered on a light gray rectangular background.

Bruce Gellin, MD, MPH  
President, Global Immunization  
Sabin Vaccine Institute  
2175 K St, NW  
Suite 400  
Washington, DC 20037

e: [bruce.gellin@sabin.org](mailto:bruce.gellin@sabin.org); [bruce.gellin@gmail.com](mailto:bruce.gellin@gmail.com)  
c: 202-642-0748



6/4/2021

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chair  
Senate Health, Education, Labor, & Pensions Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr  
Ranking Member  
Senate Health, Education, Labor, & Pensions Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairwoman Murray, Senator Burr:

On behalf of Resolve to Save Lives, I am writing to express our support for the nomination of Dawn O'Connell to be the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR) at the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Resolve to Save Lives is committed to making the world safer from epidemics. Our Prevent Epidemics team provides technical assistance to at-risk countries directly and through partners, mobilizes resources to support preparedness, and catalyzes political will to address gaps. By working across the spectrum, our small team accelerates progress to make the world safer from the next epidemic.

Based on my experience working with Dawn while I was Director of the CDC for eight years under the Obama Administration, I am confident that she is the right person to be leading the ASPR organization. Throughout her career, Dawn has demonstrated her focus on public service both in and out of government jobs. As a trusted advisor to Members of Congress and Cabinet officials, she has proven to be an experienced global leader and diplomatic partner on global health issues and, in her current role coordinating the Department-wide response to the pandemic, she has demonstrated the knowledge and expertise necessary to manage uncertainty in this unprecedented crisis.

During the Obama Administration, Dawn played a leading role in the Administration's health and humanitarian response on high-priority global issues, including the Ebola and Zika outbreaks, addressing the needs of unaccompanied children, and protecting refugees. She worked with international government leaders and federal and private partners to resolve key policy challenges that emerged, and led implementation of efforts to overcome challenges and contain outbreaks before they escalated.

In my years working with Dawn, I found her to be professional, thoughtful, effective, and truly a pleasure to collaborate with. She is someone who focuses on the work that needs to get done and works strategically and persistently to do what's needed to succeed.

100 Broadway  
4th Floor  
New York, NY 10005  
T +212-500-5725  
[www.resolve Tosavelives.org](http://www.resolve Tosavelives.org)

As director for the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness and Innovation, she worked alongside the world's most experienced infectious disease, humanitarian, and public health experts to better prepare the world to address infectious disease outbreaks. She has unique experience in domestic and international preparedness to ensure the US has the capacity to be a worldwide example of both the immediate epidemic response, as well as strategic planning to avoid and address future crises.

If confirmed by the Senate, I believe Dawn will be an exceptional Assistant Secretary, ensuring significantly improved coordination and transparency in intergovernmental response and disaster preparedness activities. I am also confident that she will work within her organization to prioritize modernizing the Strategic National Stockpile inventory, distribution, and procurement prioritization process.

If you require any additional information, please feel free to reach out to me directly by email:  
[frieden@resolvetosavelives.org](mailto:frieden@resolvetosavelives.org).

Sincerely,



Thomas R. Frieden, MD, MPH  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
[frieden@resolvetosavelives.org](mailto:frieden@resolvetosavelives.org)

**Tom Frieden, MD, MPH**  
President and CEO  
[www.DrTomFrieden.net](http://www.DrTomFrieden.net)  
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**Global Health  
Advocacy Incubator**  
1400 I Street NW, Suite 1200  
Washington, D.C. 20005 USA



June 7, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chair  
Senate Health, Education, Labor & Pensions Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr  
Ranking Member  
Senate Health, Education, Labor & Pensions Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC. 20510

Re: Nomination of Dawn O'Connell for HHS Assistant Secretary for  
Preparedness and Response

Dear Senator Murray and Senator Burr:

The Global Health Advocacy Incubator (GHAI), a program of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, is pleased to support the nomination of Dawn O'Connell for the position of Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

As a Washington, DC-based NGO, GHAI works with civil society organizations across the globe, providing strategic support to advocates to enact and implement laws that save lives. We support advocacy campaigns on a broad range of public health issues, including building support for investments in epidemic preparedness as a partner of the Resolve to Save Lives initiative. On the basis of that work, as well as our broader portfolio of public health issues, we know that experienced and respected leadership is key to implementation of effective policies. GHAI has witnessed Dawn's work on the COVID response, as well as her leadership as Director of CEPI's US Office. On a personal level, I worked closely with her for six years during my tenure in the HHS Office of Global Affairs while Dawn was Senior Counselor to the Secretary of HHS. As a result, we are confident that Dawn O'Connell would bring the needed expertise and talents to the role of Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response.

Throughout her career, Dawn has exemplified the qualities we need in leadership. She has managed multiple crises, including Ebola, Zika, COVID, unaccompanied children and refugees, and has always done so with persistence, determination, and a calming demeanor despite often chaotic circumstances. Dawn is an expert and an advocate; her most recent position with CEPI, working alongside the world's most notable infectious disease, humanitarian and public health experts, has given her the experience and credibility to ensure that the US can serve as a global example of strategic and immediate pandemic and epidemic response.

In addition to her technical and management expertise, Dawn is superb at establishing partnerships, building coalitions, and working with both allies and opponents. Advising Members of Congress and Cabinet officials, she has always reached out to build consensus and to seek solutions. Not surprisingly, Dawn is widely respected by colleagues and partners around the globe, who appreciate her skills, transparency, honesty, and resolve.

The role of HHS Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response is particularly critical today, and there is no better candidate for this position than Dawn O'Connell.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Holly Wong', with a stylized, flowing script.

Holly Wong  
Vice President  
Global Health Advocacy Incubator



June 7, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chair  
Committee on Health, Education, Labor, & Pensions  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Health, Education, Labor, & Pensions  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chair Murray and Ranking Member Burr:

I am writing to support the nomination of Dawn O'Connell to the position of Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

As the Executive Director of FasterCures, a Center of the Milken Institute focused on advancing biomedical innovation, I have been working with Ms. O'Connell through her role with the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) on a comprehensive response to COVID-19, focused primarily on vaccine development issues. Her work to accelerate the successful deployment of vaccines is experience that will be vitally important as we move into the next phase of pandemic recovery.

Ms. O'Connell's leadership will be critical to help the world better prepare for any future epidemics or pandemics, an issue critical to the Milken Institute's efforts to develop a vision for a comprehensive early warning system that will protect lives and livelihoods. As we push for better coordination as a global community against pathogens of concern, Ms. O'Connell's track record of success in this area will be invaluable.

In short, Dawn O'Connell's deep career experience at the intersection of global health, vaccines, and preparedness makes her incredibly well-qualified for this role, and I look forward to continuing our collaboration into the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Esther Krofah".

Esther Krofah  
Executive Director  
FasterCures

June 6th, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chair  
Senate Health, Education, Labor, & Pensions Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr  
Ranking Member  
Senate Health, Education, Labor, & Pensions Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairwoman Murray, Senator Burr:

I write to express my support for the nomination of Dawn O'Connell to be the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). I have dedicated my career to biodefense and served in several senior U.S. Government positions, including as the Assistant Commissioner for Emerging Threats (2010-2017) and the Acting Chief Scientist (2015-2017) at the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and as Director for Medical and Biodefense Preparedness at the National Security Council (NSC) (2017-2019).

Based on my experience working closely with Dawn I am confident that she is the right person to be leading HHS's preparedness and response activities. I speak from extensive personal experience, having worked closely with Dawn in the response to several public health emergencies. Dawn is extremely focused and is one of the most effective people I know to execute and implement complex U.S. Government programs.

Throughout her career, Dawn has demonstrated the strongest commitment to public service. She is an experienced global leader and diplomatic partner on global health issues and in her current role coordinating the Department-wide response to the pandemic she has shown she has what it takes in this moment of unprecedented crisis and uncertainty.

During the Obama Administration, Dawn played a leading role in the Obama administration's health and humanitarian response on high-priority global issues, including the Ebola and Zika outbreaks, addressing the needs of unaccompanied children, and protecting refugees. She worked with international government leaders and federal and private partners to resolve a range of challenges and successfully implemented actions to mitigate a number of crises.

As director for the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness and Innovation she has worked alongside the world's most experienced infectious disease, humanitarian, and public health experts to better prepare the world to address infectious disease outbreaks.

If confirmed by the Senate I believe Dawn is the right person to ensure that the United States and the rest of the world recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, restore the role of the ASPR in leading and coordinating our nation's biodefense efforts, and get us ready for the next public health crisis.

Sincerely,

Luciana L. Borio, M.D.

Former Director for Medical and Biodefense Preparedness, NSC  
Former Acting Chief Scientist, FDA  
Former Assistant Commissioner for Biodefense and Emerging Threats, FDA

May 27, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chair  
Committee on Health, Education,  
Labor and Pensions  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Health, Education,  
Labor and Pensions  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 2051

Dear Chair Murray and Ranking Member Burr:

I am very pleased to write today to recommend Dawn O'Connell for the role of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response at the Department of Health and Human Services. She was nominated for this role by President Biden on March 25, 2021.

Dawn O'Connell served in my Congressional office for 13 years—rising through the ranks first as Legislative Counsel then Legislative Director and finally as Chief of Staff. In each of these roles Dawn excelled in every possible way: at critical thinking, strong communication, and she always led the staff in a balanced and collegial way.

While in my office, Dawn managed a challenging portfolio of issues that included health care, taxes and trade. She learned everything she could about each of the issues and worked carefully to communicate them clearly and effectively to the constituents of my District whether or not they agreed with the positions I took. Dawn made it a point to treat everyone with respect and to listen to all sides of a policy debate before making a recommendation to me. That's why I always respected her judgment and trusted her advice.

Dawn has a natural way of leading people. She never shied away from doing the hard things and always set an example that the whole team wanted to follow. As Chief of Staff, she led the modernization of the office constituent correspondence system and updated the office's internal budgeting and human resource functions—no small feat in an office that functioned for 28 years. She did all of this with grace and good humor and the strong support of the rest of the staff.

Dawn will bring these tremendous qualities of hard work and strong leadership to the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response role for which she has been nominated. The American people will be lucky to have her in such an important role. And for all those reasons, I very much hope the Senate approves her confirmation.

Warmly,

  
John M. Spratt, Jr.

[Whereupon, at 12:04 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

○