



March 20, 2023

The Honorable Edward J. Markey
255 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Randal Paul, MD
167 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Markey and Dr. Paul,

On behalf of the Big Cities Health Coalition ([BCHC](#)), we write in support of the reintroduction of the *Modernizing Opioid Treatment Access Act* (S. 644). This legislation would greatly expand access to methadone for patients with opioid use disorder (OUD) at a time when overdose from polysubstance use is at an all-time high.

BCHC is comprised of health officials who lead 35 of the nation's largest metropolitan health departments; together they serve more than 61 million – or about one in five – Americans. Our members work every day to keep their communities healthy and safe. Big city health departments work not only to prevent and reduce harm from overdoses, but also to improve outcomes for people who use drugs. They are among the first to detect trends in emerging drugs, identify inequities in fatal and non-fatal overdoses, recognize hot spots, fund and provide supportive services designed to reduce harm to individuals who use drugs, hold systemwide convenings, and implement quality improvement initiatives. Big city health departments are also the first to identify and respond to local impacts, working to mitigate the effect of overdose and other harmful effects of substance use, including disease transmission. They pilot and test innovative strategies that are often later implemented in communities across their respective states and the country.

BCHC [supports](#) expanding access to methadone outside of the Opioid Treatment Program (OTP) setting and therefore lauds the *Modernizing Opioid Treatment Access Act* for doing so. We join you in seeking to save lives by addressing antiquated, forty-year-old methadone regulations. Research on the COVID flexibilities for methadone access showed no evidence of increased methadone [overdose](#) or [diversion](#). Additionally, there are fewer than [1,700 OTPs](#) in the U.S., leaving both rural and urban areas with severely limited access to this lifesaving treatment. The bill would also fix the inconsistent policy that pharmacies can dispense methadone for pain but not to treat OUD. The bill also allows for the use of telehealth support for counseling and other ancillary services. Furthermore, expanding access to methadone outside of OTPs will help decrease the stigma people experience when seeking treatment by allowing people to receive it in a regular health care setting rather than a specialized facility.

BCHC stands ready to work with you to ensure patients with OUD receive the treatment they need. This legislation is an important component to reducing barriers and increasing access to MOUD. Please do not hesitate to contact me at juliano@bigcitieshealth.org if we can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chrissie Juliano". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Chrissie Juliano, MPP
Executive Director