TO:
Gov. Chris Christie & Members of the President's Commission on Combating Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis
Office of National Drug Control Policy
Executive Office of the President

RE: Action Needed for the President's Commission to Help Close Deadly Opioid Global Postal Service Loophole

We are pleased that the Trump Administration is prioritizing responding to the opioid epidemic. The expertise and breadth of experience residing in this task force is an acknowledgement that there is no single solution to this dilemma: it will take the concerted efforts of all aspects of our society to begin to resolve America's opioid crisis. But no strategy will work without a serious approach to the illegal supply chain that is allowing these drugs to enter the U.S. in the first place, and too often it begins with the global postal system.

Currently, a dangerous loophole in the international postal system is allowing synthetic drugs to reach the United States without the important security information that officials need to detect, locate and stop these packages from being delivered. According to the Department of Homeland Security, at least 340 million packages reach the United States from foreign posts every year without the advance electronic security data that would allow law enforcement to identify packages containing hazardous materials, including fentanyl and other deadly drugs.

President Trump acknowledged the importance of closing this global postal loophole in a campaign speech in New Hampshire and in his plan to address the opioid epidemic, saying his administration would “crack down on the abuse of the loopholes in the Postal Service to literally mail fentanyl and other drugs to users and dealers in the United States.”

This postal network security gap poses a growing public health threat, and as you know the need for action is critical. Powerful synthetic opioids, including fentanyl and carfentanil, are increasingly manufactured in foreign laboratories, purchased on the ‘dark web’ and shipped through the global postal system to the U.S. Postal Service, which delivers them to Americans’ homes in communities across the country. A February report from the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission concluded that chemicals from China have helped fuel the fentanyl crisis in the United States. With the rise of e-commerce, the sheer abundance of these toxic substances creates an easy path for children, addicts, drug traffickers and others to go online and access deadly, illegal drugs from China and other foreign countries.

It’s estimated that drug overdose deaths will exceed 59,000 in 2016, the largest annual jump ever recorded in the United States. This makes drug overdoses the leading cause of death for Americans under 50. This growing epidemic hits especially hard for those on the frontlines of the crisis. In recent weeks, first responders in Maryland, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Kentucky and Ohio were treated for overdoses after coming into contact with synthetic opioids while on the job, including a detective exposed while doing routine drug testing and an officer who reached for a driver’s license on the scene of a car crash.

As the first Secretary of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security under George W. Bush and a former Assistant Secretary at the Department of Homeland Security, respectively, our jobs were to keep the
American people safe. As members of the Commission on Combating Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis, that duty now turns to you to help stop one of the biggest epidemics facing our country in decades.

As the Commission puts together a report on what is needed to combat the opioid epidemic, we fully support efforts for the U.S. government to require foreign posts to submit customs and advance electronic data for shipments imported to the United States. We also support efforts in Congress to pass the bipartisan, bicameral Synthetics Trafficking & Overdose Prevention (STOP) Act, S.372/H.R.1057, which requires mail shipped through foreign posts to send the same advanced electronic data as private carriers. This legislation has over 150 bipartisan cosponsors in the House and 17 bipartisan Senate cosponsors, and we urge the administration to help move this bill through Congress and to the president’s desk for swift enactment.

We look forward to seeing your recommendations, and hope they will include action to stem the tide of deadly opioids by closing this major security loophole. We appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely,

Governor Tom Ridge and Juliette Kayyem
Senior Advisors, Americans for Securing All Packages