

Governor Philip Murphy
Office of the New Jersey Governor
PO Box 001
Trenton, NJ 08625

Dear Governor Murphy,

The undersigned mental health, substance use disorder, and healthcare professional organizations would like to share our support for **S3867/A5868** which would help New Jersey fairly and equitably invest in solutions to address the needs of people with substance use disorders (SUD).

The need for a stronger, more focused approach to reducing these deaths and saving lives is more important than ever, as America is facing the single worst drug crisis in its history. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the problem, with new data showing that in the 12-month period ending in October 2020, the United States exceeded 90,000 overdose deaths¹ – a 29% increase over the same period in 2019 and the highest number of fatal overdoses ever recorded.

States, cities, and counties will soon be receiving funds from opioid manufacturers, pharmaceutical distributors and pharmacies as a result of litigation brought against these companies for their role in the opioid epidemic that has claimed more than half a million lives over the past two decades. Governors, attorneys general, and legislators will face difficult decisions in determining the best use of the funds. We encourage/appreciate the adoption/inclusion of all [five guiding principles for use of opioid litigation funds](#):

1. Spend money to save lives.
2. Use evidence to guide spending.
3. Invest in youth prevention.
4. Focus on racial equity.
5. Develop a fair and transparent process for deciding where to spend the funding.

We urge you to pay particular attention to Principle One, *Spend Money to Save Lives*. Given the economic downturn, many states and localities may be tempted to use the dollars to fill holes in their budgets rather than expand needed programs. Jurisdictions should use the funds to supplement rather than replace existing spending and report to the public how and where the money is being spent. To ensure this happens, it is critical to establish a statewide dedicated fund that would protect the settlement funds from the various lawsuits.

Additionally, we urge you to pay particular attention to Principle Two, *Use Evidence to Guide Spending*. At this point in the overdose epidemic, researchers and clinicians have built a substantial body of evidence demonstrating what works and what does not. States and localities should use this information to guide funding decisions. To ensure this happens, funds should be directed toward [evidence-based programs](#), removing policies that block adoption of programs that work, building capacity for strong, and further robust data collection.

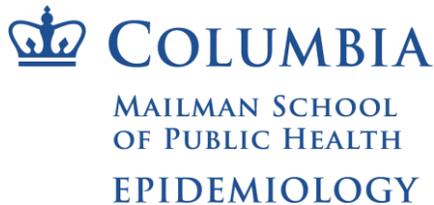
¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm#notes>

Throughout this process, we urge you to ensure a focus on racial equity. Although minority communities experience substance use disorders at similar rates as other racial groups, in recent years the rate of opioid overdose deaths has been increasing more rapidly in Black populations than in white ones. Additionally, historically racist policies and practices have led to a differential impact of the epidemic. Without a focus on racial equity when allocating settlement funds, localities run the risk of continuing a cycle of inequity.

Opioid use and substance use disorders contribute to the deaths of tens of thousands of Americans each year, many of which are preventable. To reduce this burden, much more action must be taken to prevent and treat these disorders. As such, we wanted to make our support for **S3867/A5868** known and emphasize the importance of ensuring the funds received from opioid-related litigation are used to address these issues. Please sign this bill into law as swiftly as possible.

If you have any questions or need more information, please contact Courtney Hunter, Vice President of State Policy at Shatterproof: chunter@shatterproof.org

Sincerely,



CC:

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