



February 7, 2017

The Honorable Rick Scott
Governor of Florida
The Capitol
400 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

MELISSA MCKINLAY
County Commissioner
District 6
Palm Beach County
Board of County Commissioners



Governmental Center
301 North Olive Avenue, 12th Floor
West Palm Beach, FL 33401
Telephone: (561) 355-2206
Facsimile: (561) 355-4366
mmckinlay@pbcgov.org



Glades Office Complex
2976 State Road #15
Belle Glade, FL 33430
Telephone: (561) 996-4814
Facsimile: (561) 992-1038



www.pbcgov.com

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Dear Governor Scott:

As the Vice-Mayor of Palm Beach County, I am writing to ask for your urgent help in combating the opioid epidemic that is devastating families and communities throughout the state.

The Florida Department of Law Enforcement released a study last year that showed this epidemic escalating statewide. In 2015, Florida suffered 733 deaths caused by heroin, 705 by fentanyl, 565 by oxycodone, and 236 by hydrocodone. The rise is stark: from 2014 to 2015, heroin deaths rose 79.7 percent and fentanyl by 77.6 percent.

In 2016, Palm Beach County alone fielded over 4,000 overdose calls, with more than 500 estimated opioid overdose deaths.

In addition to the devastating loss of life, this epidemic is also having a significant financial impact. The cost to Palm Beach County Fire Rescue for Narcan has risen from \$57,543 for the 2015 fiscal year to \$205,346 in 2016. Furthermore, each overdose call costs our Fire Rescue upwards of \$1500. Statewide, the Palm Beach Post reports that all hospital charges related to the heroin epidemic, in which Medicaid was the primary insurer, were at least \$2.1 billion in 2015.

The addictiveness of the opioids that have flooded our state is shocking. Fentanyl is 100 times more potent than morphine and carfentanil is 10,000 times.

We have taken action at the local level. For example, Palm Beach County recently launched a pilot program in an effort to reduce the heroin overdose death toll. Thirty emergency room patients being treated for overdose symptoms will be given Suboxone and home



counseling with the goal to wean them off of drugs. Still, our actions alone will not be enough.

In 2014, Massachusetts declared a public health emergency after heroin deaths rose sharply. In November 2016, Virginia also declared a public health emergency in response to the staggering increase in deaths the state has seen.

Recognizing how deadly the opioid epidemic has become in Florida, I urge you to declare a public health emergency in our state. Although day after day we are battling this crisis as hard as we can with our limited resources, local governments cannot solve this crisis on our own. By making this declaration, the state would not only help raise awareness of the epidemic, but it would provide expanded options to combat it.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss additional ways that the state may join forces with its local governments in fighting this deadly crisis that is robbing families of their loved ones.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Melissa McKinlay". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Melissa McKinlay, Vice-Mayor
Palm Beach County Commission
District 6

cc: Florida Attorney General Pam Bondi