

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 14, 2011

Michele Leonhart
Administrator
United States Drug Enforcement Administration
8701 Morrisette Drive
Springfield, Virginia 22152

RE: Prescription Drug Abuse in Ohio

Dear Administrator Leonhart:

According to the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), prescription drug abuse is the fastest-growing drug problem in the United States, with prescription drugs currently ranked as one of the most abused category of drugs in our nation. While there are local, state, and federal efforts underway to combat this growing epidemic, I write to ask for the Drug Enforcement Administration's (DEA) continued help in cracking down on "pill mills" in Ohio.

While prescription drug abuse affects every state, it is hitting Ohio especially hard. Deaths from prescription drug overdoses doubled nationwide between 1999 and 2006. In Ohio, they tripled. Last year in Ohio, then-Governor Strickland established a Prescription Drug Abuse Task Force to bring together public health experts, sheriffs, prosecutors, coroners, police chiefs, and medical and pharmacy boards in an effort to develop recommendations for addressing prescription drug abuse in our state. This week, Ohio Attorney General DeWine announced that his office is dedicating personnel and funds to help fight this problem in Ohio, and legislation has been introduced at the state level to strengthen pain-clinic licensure, improve consumer education, and formalize Ohio's "take-back" programs.

At the federal level, we have been working on legislation that would prevent teenagers from gaining access to discarded prescription drugs by permitting individuals and long-term care facilities to deliver unused drugs for safe disposal and by expanding drug "take-back" programs. We have also been working to reauthorize the National All Schedules Prescription Electronic Drug Reporting Act (NASPER), a prescription drug monitoring program critical to combating the abuse of prescription drugs. In addition, I am working with Ohio's Medicaid Director to establish a "lock-in" program to crack down on the fraudulent use of Medicaid cards to obtain opioids, such as Oxycontin.

Despite these efforts, Ohio will need continued assistance with respect to "pill mills." As you are aware, this term refers to doctors, pharmacies, or illegal pain clinics that prescribe and dispense prescription drugs inappropriately or for non-medical reasons or personal financial gain. In June

2010, the DEA placed Scioto County on a watch list of the 10 most significant places in the nation for trafficking of medications. According to an ONN report, Scioto County has the largest concentration of questionable pain clinics per capita of all of Ohio's counties, but is having difficulty combating the problem alone.

The DEA has taken some important steps in recent years to identify and shut down "pill mills" across Ohio: last year, the DEA raided two Portsmouth "pill mills." I thank you for working to shut down these illegal operations and for working with Ohio's local law enforcement. As we move forward, I urge the DEA to redouble its efforts in Ohio to shut down illegal "pill mills." The cost of allowing these illegal operations to continue is simply too high; it perpetuates addiction, fosters drug dealing, and most tragically, leads to overdose deaths. I would appreciate you keeping my office informed of the DEA's efforts to combat prescription drug abuse in Ohio. In addition, if my office can assist in your efforts – whether legislatively or otherwise – please do not hesitate to let me know.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter and I look forward to continue working with you to crack down on prescription drug abuse in Ohio.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sherrod Brown". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sherrod Brown
United States Senator