

September 17, 2024

The House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
2165 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Sam Graves and Ranking Member Rick Larsen,

On behalf of the National Association of State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors (NASADAD), the Kennedy Forum, the International Association of Emergency Managers, and the National Council for Mental Wellbeing, we are writing in support of the Addressing Addiction After Disasters (AAAD) Act, H.R. 5623. The AAAD Act would ensure that the statute governing federal disaster response programming recognizes the need to specifically address alcohol and drug issues. We appreciate your work on this issue and to advance this bill.

As you may know, Section 416 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act authorizes the Crisis Counseling Training and Assistance Program (CCP). This program is housed within the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Through an interagency agreement, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS) provides consultation, technical assistance, and training of personnel. CCP grants are released after a presidential declaration to support time-limited outreach, identification, short-term counseling, referrals, and other activities to those impacted by disasters.

Currently, the authorization governing the CCP does not explicitly reference substance use disorders. Yet studies have shown that disasters significantly impact alcohol and other drug use. After Hurricane Katrina, for example, alcohol consumption increased by approximately 185% (Beaudoin, C, Public Health Reports, 2011), and the annual hospitalization rate for substance use disorders increased by approximately 30% (Moise, I & Ruiz, M, Preventing Chronic Disease, 2016). Further, after Hurricane Sandy, 60% of individuals with substance use disorders experienced withdrawal and 70% of those on opioid maintenance therapy could not obtain sufficient doses (Pouget et al., Substance Use Misuse, 2015). As one researcher summarized, "Stress is a well-known risk factor in the development of addiction and in addiction relapse vulnerability" (Sinha, 2008).

The AAAD Act would seek to strengthen our disaster response work by specifically referencing alcohol and drug issues within the CCP. In addition, this bill would initiate work to systematically update the CCP application, toolkit, and other related guidance documents with alcohol and drug issues in mind. We believe these seemingly small changes represent large steps that will help people in need.

Our organizations, as leaders on this issue, support this legislation's successful passage out of committee. Thank you again for your work to advance the Addressing Addiction After Disasters Act.

Sincerely,

Robert I.L. Morrison
Executive Director/Director of Legislative Affairs
National Association of State Alcohol and Drug
Abuse Directors (NASADAD)

Carrie Speranza, CEM
President
International Association of Emergency Managers

Lauren Finke
Senior Director of Policy
The Kennedy Forum

Peter Delia, JD
Manager of Federal Policy
The National Council for Mental Wellbeing