

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

March 17, 2016

The Honorable Barack Obama  
President of the United States of America  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

In April 2016, there will be a United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on the World Drug Problem in New York City. This will be the first UNGASS on this subject since 1998. Since that time, and thanks in large part to your leadership, the United States has made significant advancements, moving away from the outdated and harmful rhetoric and policies historically surrounding this issue and toward policies focused on public health and civil and human rights.

This UNGASS will therefore be an important opportunity for you and your Administration to showcase these advancements, and we encourage you to take full advantage of this timely and powerful event to communicate our progress toward a more effective, science-based approach to drugs to the rest of the world.

In recent years, the United States has significantly moved our domestic drug policy from a punitive approach, almost entirely focused on the criminal justice system, to one centered on public health and healthcare, access to treatment services, and harm reduction tools that reduce overdose and spread of infection. These changes have occurred at the local, state, and federal levels and have had the support and leadership of policymakers across the political spectrum. Examples include the fact that 23 states, DC and Guam have legalized the use of medical marijuana, and four states have approved systems to legalize and regulate adult use of marijuana, rather than maintain prohibition. In December of 2015, Congress also passed legislation that included language enabling states and localities to spend federal funds on syringe access programs, effectively lifting the decades-long ban on federal funding for such programs that have been proven to reduce HIV infection rates. Further, over the past ten years, many states have reexamined their drug sentencing laws, recognizing that the costs of long drug sentences are enormous in both financial and human terms, many are now aiming to improve public safety and control the burden on the taxpayer by reducing sentence lengths for drug offenses and addressing disparities in sentences for crack and powder cocaine. Finally, states and localities have increased the availability of community-based prevention and diversion supports, expanding access to evidence-based treatment programs.

While there still remains much to be done in the United States to fully support a public health and harm reduction approach, under your leadership, the Administration has made changes in federal policy and has supported the work of these state and local leaders. We are moving in a good direction, and this shift in United States domestic drug policy over the last decade has the potential to serve as a model for the international community, cautioning other countries against a dangerously punitive response and demonstrating an approach to drug policy that is more compassionate, just, and effective or the local and the international levels.

The world looks to the United States for leadership on the issues that impact the global community. Drug policy is one of those issues. We urge you and other representatives of your Administration to highlight at every opportunity our nation's growing commitment to the protection of the health and safety of individuals, communities, and nations. The discussions and outcomes of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) meetings happening in Vienna this week, for example, will set the tone for the UNGASS in April. We hope that the official United States delegates to the CND convey the tremendous progress that has been made domestically and reiterate the importance of approaching drug policies with a lens focused on public health and civil and human rights to ensure the success of the 2016 UNGASS.

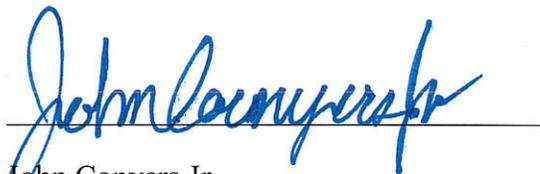
Finally, we hope that you will deliver the plenary address on behalf of the United States, as President Clinton did during the last UNGASS on drugs. That unique platform gives you the opportunity to elevate the 2016 UNGASS on the World Drug Problem and change the way drug policy is approached, not only domestically, but also around the world, establishing the United States' commitment to a new approach on an international scale.

We thank you in advance for your consideration of this request, and look forward to continuing to work with you on these critical issues.

Sincerely,



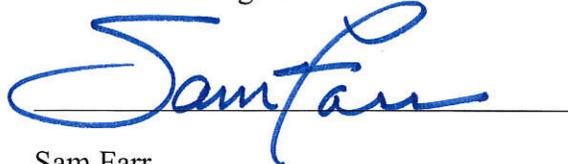
Earl Blumenauer  
Member of Congress



John Conyers Jr  
Member of Congress



Steve Cohen  
Member of Congress



Sam Farr  
Member of Congress



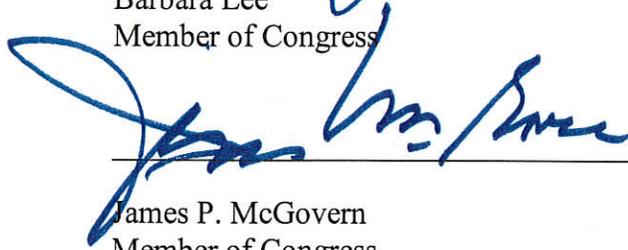
Chris Van Hollen  
Member of Congress



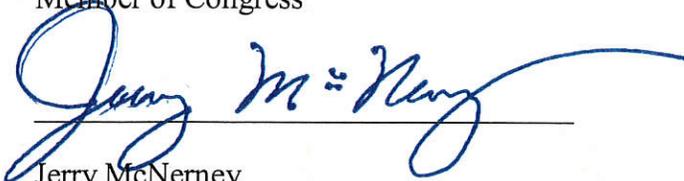
Barbara Lee  
Member of Congress



Ted Lieu  
Member of Congress



James P. McGovern  
Member of Congress



Jerry McNerney  
Member of Congress



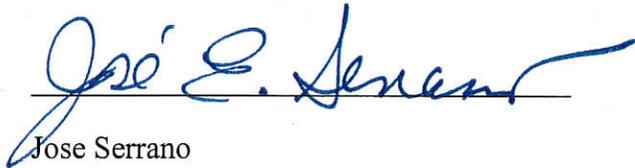
Eleanor Holmes Norton  
Member of Congress



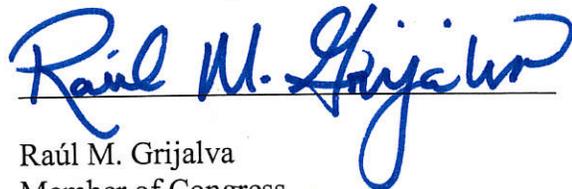
Beto O'Rourke  
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