

December 18, 2020



To Whom It May Concern:

I write to the Biden/Harris Transition Team in support of former **U.S. Representative Patrick Kennedy** as **Director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy**.

My background includes being an addiction psychiatrist, having taught at Harvard Medical School for 25 years, where I directed the Addiction Research Program at Massachusetts General Hospital. I serve as the Chief Architect of the American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM) CONTINUUM implementation of the ASAM Criteria. The ASAM Criteria are the standard for medical necessity criteria endorsed by 35 states, the VA and DOD. I have worked with, received funding from, and/or consulted to many states, payers, numerous federal agencies (e.g., AHRQ, CDC, FDA, NIAAA, NIDA, ONDCP, PCORI) and foreign governments (China, Belgium, Switzerland, Iceland, Israel, Russia).

Patrick Kennedy has a unique combination of experience, skills, and intellect for this role. Having served as an elected official, particularly a Congressman, and someone who has lived in the political world his entire life, he has worked for constituents, within party, across the aisle, and through both legislative houses. With his father, the late Senator Ted Kennedy, he achieved the historic passage of landmark legislation – the federal Parity Act. More importantly, he shares the lived experience of substance use disorder and recovery, with all its ramifications for family, community, stigma, and redemption. He shared his story and his family's story publicly – remarkably and courageously, in a best-selling memoir that has been praised for its capacity to heal other individuals and families. Most importantly, he is one of the few in a generation with the capacity to galvanize laypersons and advocates with a clarifying vision of how to balance public health and public safety in compelling oratory that speaks to diverse audiences.

This new administration has a dramatic opportunity and responsibility. There is pent-up demand for addressing the dual opioid and stimulant epidemics, dangerously exacerbated by COVID-19, with a disastrous lag in leadership over the past four years. ONDCP's role in a Biden administration can be restored to the Cabinet level and can truly exercise multi-agency oversight, coordination, and integration of science-based, effective policy. Crises and challenges abound – including persisting inadequate access to opioid use disorder care, the lack of evidence-based practice, the general absence of effective treatments for stimulant use disorder except for little-used motivational incentives, the implications of exponential growth in cannabis use, the complete lack of standards or outcome measurement among providers, and an antiquated payment system that has yet to fulfill the promises of the Parity Act and ACA.

Yet we live in a window of opportunity when society – all strata – recognize that addiction is a disease, criminalization wastes dollars and lives, and stigmatization is fundamentally an issue of civil rights. CMS and commercial payers are struggling to advance payment reform that will drive treatment-by-outcomes, management-by-data, and value-based contracting. The technologies to make these changes

The New York Times

The 2019 Good Tech Awards

MassChallenge eHealth accelerator winner 2018, 2019, 2020

Sponsoring Champions: Aetna | Mass. General Hospital | Harvard Pilgrim Healthcare | City of Boston

Grand Prize \$1 Million Award, Gov. John Kasich's Ohio Opioid Challenge

Global Grand Prize Winner, Harvard Business School New Venture Competition

Platinum Award, Anthem BCBS 2020

feasible are all here – but the initiative and determination are not. This is why we need someone with the yearning and talents of Representative Kennedy.

There are scientists and addiction specialists who can work on behalf of ONCDP – many. There are policy directors and program officials, who can work the operational gears. There are camera-ready presenters, shrewd operatives, and unidimensional issues drivers. But ONDCP has suffered a tremendous loss of ground in recent years. Now, it needs a leader who has heart, is generative, and inspired. Mr. Kennedy is possessed of an exceptional character: remarkably humble, down-to-earth, sweet – but indefatigably and tenaciously determined on behalf of those in need. There are figureheads and representatives of diverse constituencies, stakeholders and activists. But I cannot think of anyone who better embodies the humanity, vision, and call-to-arms that the White House now needs in this role than Patrick Kennedy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "David Gastfriend".

David Gastfriend
Co-founder & Chief Medical Officer, DynamiCare Health