

GUS M. BILIRAKIS  
12TH DISTRICT, FLORIDA

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SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515-0912

WASHINGTON OFFICE:  
 2112 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-0912  
(202) 225-5755

DISTRICT OFFICES:  
 7132 LITTLE ROAD  
NEW PORT RICHEY, FL 34664-5614  
(727) 232-2921

600 KLOSTERMAN ROAD  
ROOM BB38  
TARPON SPRINGS, FL 34689-1299  
(727) 940-5860

September 10, 2018

The Honorable Alex Azar, Secretary  
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue SW  
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Azar:

As you are well aware, the opioid epidemic has ravaged communities across the country. While policymakers at all levels, including myself, have rightfully been working to address this crisis and save lives, we cannot ignore the fact that some patients have a legitimate need for pain medication. Many constituents in my district regularly report experiencing difficulty accessing the medication they have been prescribed for their well-documented medical conditions.

This concern prompted me to co-sponsor the Ensuring Patient Access and Effective Drug Enforcement Act of 2016 (S.483), which became law on April 19, 2016. Specifically, I was eager to see stakeholders come to the table to discuss how to prevent abuse while identifying obstacles to legitimate patient access to medications. Section 3(a) of the law requires the Secretary of Health and Human Services to submit a report to Congress containing this critical information within one year of enactment. It is my understanding that we still have not received this report, though it is more than a year after it was required. This issue is very important to me personally, and to my constituents. Public policy must ensure a delicate balance of putting necessary safeguards in place to prevent abuse while ensuring access to medication for those with legitimate pain. It also must respect the critical role of trained medical professionals, and not politicians, in developing appropriate treatment plans.

Thank you in advance for your prompt attention to this matter. I look forward to reading the report very soon and using it to guide legislative efforts about how best to fix this problem.

Respectfully,



Gus M. Bilirakis  
Member of Congress