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MAURA T. HEALEY
GOVERNOR

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LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

August 24, 2023

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I write to request President Biden lower flags to half-mast on August 31, 2023, in observance of International Overdose Awareness Day and in remembrance of the millions of American lives lost to the overdose crisis.

The flag code states that the “United States flag flies at half-staff or at half-mast when the nation or a state is in mourning.” Given the number of American lives claimed by the overdose crisis, and the ongoing tragedy of high overdose rates nationwide increasing overdose rates nationwide, there is no question that this country is in mourning.

More than one million Americans have lost their lives to overdose since 1999, and the devastating consequences of the overdose crisis can be seen in nearly every community across the country. In Massachusetts, this national epidemic continues to cause tremendous loss of life and ongoing trauma in our communities. Over the past decade, our state has been shaped by the heartbreaking loss of 22,000 people – parents, children, friends, loved ones – who have died from overdoses. In 2022 alone, we lost an estimated 2,357 residents to overdose.

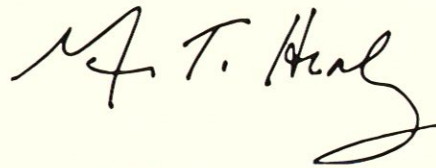
International Overdose Awareness Day is recognized annually on August 31 to mark these significant losses and recognize the pain of families, friends and communities impacted by this public health crisis. By lowering flags in remembrance of these individuals, we can both honor their memories and translate grief into action.

Overdose deaths are preventable, especially as access to addiction prevention, treatment, and harm reduction tools continues to improve across the nation. Yet harmful stigmas often prevent people from seeking the support they need, putting them at greater likelihood of a fatal overdose.

International Overdose Awareness Day presents an opportunity to fight stigma and raise awareness of this public health crisis, which disproportionately harms Black, Latino, and Indigenous residents. By publicly challenging stigmas that treat substance use disorder as a personal choice, as opposed to a medical diagnosis, we can help encourage a greater number of Americans struggling with substance use disorders to seek support and hopefully enter recovery.

A public recognition of the impact of overdose, such as the lowering of the flag, draws attention to the issue while extending support and compassion to the millions of Americans whose lives have been irreparably damaged by the overdose crisis. We, as public officials, have a moral imperative to engage in public remembrance of the millions impacted by the overdose crisis—to honor the lives lost, to support their families and loved ones, and to prevent further devastation. It is with this understanding that I respectfully request that President Biden lower flags to half-mast on August 31, 2023, in recognition of International Overdose Awareness Day.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. T. Healey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

Maura T. Healey
Governor

cc: The Honorable Elizabeth Warren
The Honorable Ed Markey
The Honorable Richard Neal
The Honorable Jim McGovern
The Honorable Lori Trahan
The Honorable Jake Auchincloss
The Honorable Katherine Clark
The Honorable Seth Moulton
The Honorable Ayanna Pressley
The Honorable Stephen Lynch
The Honorable Bill Keating
Secretary Kate Walsh