

Supreme Court
State of North Carolina
Raleigh

CHAMBERS OF
CHIEF JUSTICE MARK D. MARTIN

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May 18, 2017

The Honorable Maureen O'Connor
Chief Justice
Supreme Court of Ohio
65 South Front Street
Columbus, Ohio 43215-3431

Dear Chief Justice O'Connor:

Thank you for your letter regarding the recent work of the Regional Judicial Opioid Initiative (RJOI). Our nation's growing opioid epidemic has reached a tipping point and has become a significant threat to public health. Eliminating opioid abuse and its negative societal effects will require multistate cooperation and comprehensive solutions. On behalf of the North Carolina Judicial Branch, I graciously accept your invitation to join the RJOI.

North Carolina is not immune from the opioid crisis and has witnessed its escalating effects over the past few years. Nearly 1,500 North Carolinians died of drug overdose in 2015, with prescription opioids being responsible for about half of those deaths. Opioid addiction also leads to increased heroin usage, as demonstrated by North Carolina's 884% increase in heroin deaths since 2010. The most heartbreaking effects of this epidemic have fallen upon our state's children, since parental addiction inevitably leads to increased abuse and neglect. Our communities have too much at stake to remain passive in the face of this growing threat. The fight against opioid abuse is one that we cannot lose.

In response to these disturbing trends, North Carolina has made small gains to the fight to eliminate prescription opioid abuse and overdose. In 2014, the North Carolina General Assembly collaborated with the medical community and the North Carolina Industrial Commission to enact legislation that curtailed the in-office dispensing of prescription drugs by the prescribing physician. Limiting this controversial practice has reduced the prescribing of medically unnecessary opioids and has led to better patient outcomes in workers' compensation cases. More recently, a bipartisan group of legislators introduced the "Strengthen Opioid Misuse Prevention (STOP) Act," which seeks to reduce opioid abuse by increasing physician oversight and mandating the use of electronic reporting and monitoring systems. This legislation passed unanimously in the North Carolina House of Representatives and is currently pending in the state Senate.

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As you note, opioid poisoning is a growing regional problem that does not stop at state lines. I appreciate the RJOI's early work in identifying several court-led initiatives that seek to address this issue. A robust, intrastate prescription drug monitoring program would be a particularly effective tool in reducing the proliferation of opioids and other harmful prescription drugs. Although many of these reforms would require further action by the General Assembly and state health officials before being implemented, I look forward to working with you and other RJOI members to develop comprehensive and meaningful solutions. Thank you for your leadership on this important issue.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mark Martin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mark Martin