Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 7, 2016

Mr. Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States
U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO)
441 G Street NW – Room 7100
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

We join Senators Warren, Hatch, and Rubio in respectfully requesting that GAO conduct a review of federal and state oversight of sober homes. Although there is not a legal definition, "sober home" is a name given to group homes for individuals recovering from drug and alcohol addiction. Their purpose is to help addicts who have completed addiction treatment transition back to everyday life in a residential, community environment, so that they can begin to reintegrate into the neighborhood.

In recent years, there has been a significant proliferation of sober homes across the country, concentrating in certain residential neighborhoods and causing serious problems for neighbors and local governments. This is changing the character of residential communities and undermining the benefit of recovering addicts looking to live in a neighborhood, rather than in an institutionalized environment. The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities wrote in January 2016 that such "clustering [of] congregate housing for people with disabilities into particular neighborhoods runs contrary to the policy of community integration."

The rapid growth of the unregulated sober home industry has also allowed some predatory and unscrupulous operators to run facilities that fail to adequately serve their clients, leading to overdoses and even death. We are also concerned about allegations of "kickbacks" received by sober home administrators for referrals of residents to Medicaid-funded drug and alcohol treatment programs

The ongoing opioid epidemic has fueled even higher demand for substance abuse services, and it is critical that individuals receive the care that they need and that facilities purporting to help individuals with substance abuse are actually doing so. It is therefore important that we provide transparency and information about these sober homes to ensure responsible stewardship of limited taxpayer dollars, protect vulnerable populations, preserve the residential character of communities, and promote public health.

We request that the GAO assess the following questions:

1. How many sober homes are there in the United States? How many are in each state? How many individuals do they serve, and what are the characteristics of this population?
2. How are sober homes regulated at the federal, state, and local level? How can they be regulated?

PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER

3. What is the range of services offered by sober homes? Are sober homes being used to expand the available resources to support recovery from substance abuse disorders? What is known about the effectiveness of services offered through sober homes?
4. How do sober homes and their patients interact with Medicaid and other federally funded healthcare programs? What impact does this have on Medicaid costs and on the effectiveness of Medicaid-funded drug and alcohol abuse treatment programs?

Sober homes can be an effective recovery service for those suffering from substance abuse disorder, but little is known about how this cottage industry functions overall. Additional information about sober homes will help us to provide proper oversight to ensure that individuals' substance abuse disorders receive the care that they need.

Sincerely,

Lois Frankel
Member of Congress

Chris Stewart
Member of Congress

Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress

Dana Rohrabacher
Member of Congress

James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

Ken Calvert
Member of Congress

Theodore E. Deutch
Member of Congress

Edward R. Royce
Member of Congress

William R. Keating
Member of Congress

Darrell Issa
Member of Congress

Frederica S. Wilson
Member of Congress

Rob Bishop
Member of Congress

Katherine M. Clark
Member of Congress

Jason Chaffetz
Member of Congress

Seth Moulton
Member of Congress

Carlos Curbelo
Member of Congress

Mia Love
Member of Congress