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ATTORNEY GENERAL

**DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE**  
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January 12, 2016

Veronica Kennedy, Acting Executive Secretary  
National Center for Injury Prevention and Control  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
4770 Buford Highway NE  
Mailstop F-63  
Atlanta, GA 30341

Attn: Docket CDC-2015-0112

Re: CDC Guideline for Prescribing Opioids for Chronic Pain - 2016

Dear Ms. Kennedy:

I am writing to offer comments on the CDC's Proposed 2016 Guideline for Prescribing Opioids for Chronic Pain.

Delaware has a particularly strong interest in the issue of opioid prescriptions, because empirical evidence suggests that opioids are being prescribed in Delaware at rates that exceed those in most other states, with often tragic results. Delaware's Prescription Drug Advisory Committee found in 2013 that Delaware:

- Had the nation's ninth highest drug overdose rate;
- Had a significantly higher percentage of its residents engaging in non-medical use of prescription opioids than the national average;
- Had the nation's fifth highest overall rate for opioid sales;

More recently, the state's Division of Public Health reported that Delaware's medical providers ranked highest in the country in high-dose opioid pain relievers per 100 people, and second highest in the country in long-acting/extended relief opioid pain relievers per 100 people.

Although real-time statistics are not publicly available and Delaware has been making efforts to address opioid prescription, additional steps are clearly necessary.

Delaware is attempting at the state level to more rigorously regulate the prescription of opioids. The state's Controlled Substance Advisory Committee recently proposed a set of standards for such prescriptions, and my office made a number of suggestions that are under consideration as to how those standards could be further strengthened.

The CDC's Proposed 2016 Guideline covers some of the same areas as the proposed standards issued by Delaware's Controlled Substance Advisory Committee, but in some instances the CDC guidelines are more specific than the proposed state standards. As such, the CDC guidelines are a useful supplement to the state's impending mandatory rules, offering physicians a set of non-mandatory expert guidelines to ensure that opioids are prescribed only when necessary, and only in the amounts necessary, for proper patient care.

The process for adopting these proposed guidelines has, by the CDC's own admission, been an imperfect one. Process is important to reaching a sound medical conclusion, and I am confident that the CDC will review the thousands of comments it has received and make any changes to the proposed guidelines that are reasonably prompted by those comments. The comment deadline does not expire until tomorrow, but to date I have not seen any substantive objections to the proposed guidelines issued by any medical organizations that are not largely funded by the pharmaceutical industry.

I applaud the CDC for taking the initiative to issue these guidelines, and I encourage the CDC to finalize them after thoughtfully reviewing public comments and formally issue them as soon as possible. We have lost too many Delawareans to opioid abuse and the heroin addiction that so often follows it, we cannot delay in employing every tool at our disposal to combat this problem.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matthew P. Denn", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Matthew P. Denn  
Attorney General