

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 11, 2013

Mr. Gene L. Dodaro  
Comptroller General  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
441 G Street, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro,

We are writing you to request a study regarding neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS), which is a group of symptoms that occurs in a newborn who was exposed to addictive illegal or prescription drugs, particularly opioids, while in the mother's womb. These drugs can have significant adverse effects for the well-being of the infant and infant-maternal bond during the critical period after birth and lead to excessive irritability or the inability of the infant to eat.

In the United States, one infant is born every hour with NAS and the possible associated problems of low birthweight, respiratory diagnoses, feeding difficulty, seizure, and the additional costs of prolonged hospital care. A study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* reported that Medicaid pays for over 75 percent of the treatment costs which averages over \$50,000 for each infant. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) reports that among pregnant women in the United States, approximately 4.4% used illicit drugs in the past month. Yet NAS is a particularly difficult problem to identify early and treat definitively, requiring multi-faceted interventions, including treatment for both the expectant mother and her newborn.

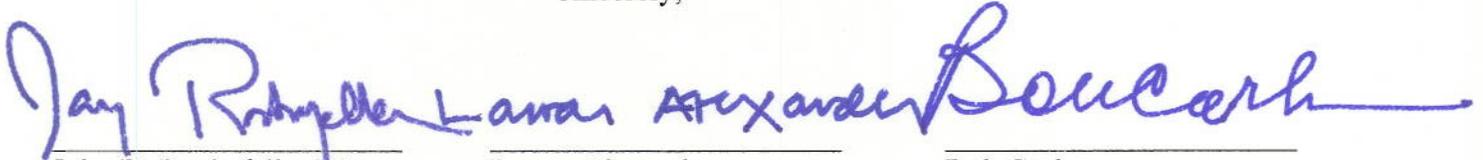
To this end, we would like the GAO to study and report information to Congress on the following:

- 1) What is known about the scope and health care costs of maternal addiction, opioid exposed infants, and neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS)
- 2) What federal programs are underway or planned to help understand, prevent and mitigate NAS, including:
  - a. Programs and funding levels for the identification, monitoring, prevention and treatment related to NAS, particularly in the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Justice
  - b. Federal/state partnerships under Medicaid for delivering prevention and treatment services for mothers and children
  - c. Research efforts to support the development of evidence-based interventions addressing maternal addiction, opioid exposed infants, NAS, the related effectiveness of those interventions, and the long-term outcomes of the syndrome and its associated treatment

- d. Agency efforts to ensure that evidence based interventions are used in their programs
- 3) What gaps exist that would strengthen efforts to prevent and mitigate the effects of NAS, including research, education, prevention, or treatment

Thank you for your attention to this difficult problem and consideration of this request. The information we gain from the GAO study will be vital as together we form strategies to reverse the disturbing trend of infants born with NAS. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Ahaviah Glaser at (202) 224-6472.

Sincerely,



John D. Rockefeller IV  
U.S. Senator

Lamar Alexander  
U.S. Senator

Bob Corker  
U.S. Senator