

The Safe Response Act

Introduced by Senators Baldwin, Hassan and Capito

A bill to support first responders and key community sectors as they work to respond to the opioid and substance use disorder crisis

Background: According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in 2021, there were 106,699 drug overdose deaths in the United States, an increase of 14 percent from the year before. Of those, over 80,000 overdose deaths were due to opioids, including fentanyl. First responders play a vital role in curbing the opioid epidemic and saving lives. Often, they are the first on the scene of an overdose and help to provide lifesaving medications, such as naloxone, to reverse an overdose. In recent years, there has been significant progress in increasing access to overdose reversal medications, but must do more to support those on the front lines of this crisis and help save lives.

Public health experts recommend increasing access to naloxone and overdose reversal tools as a way to prevent deaths due to overdose. It is essential that Congress support first responders and other key community sectors in responding to overdoses.

Summary: *The Safe Response Act* would reauthorize a grant program included as part of the bipartisan *SUPPORT Act*. Specifically, the bill would provide \$57 million per year for fiscal years 2024 through 2028 for grants to states, local government entities, Indian Tribes and tribal organizations to train and provide resources to first responders and those in key community sectors to respond to overdoses. Grants may be used to:

- Ensure that first responders and other members of key community sectors have the knowledge and training to utilize overdose reversal devices or administer overdose reversal medications, such as naloxone;
- Provide technical assistance and training about how first responders and other members of key community sectors, such as first SUD treatment providers and emergency medical service agencies, can better protect themselves in the event of exposure to such drugs;
- Establish processes, protocols, and mechanisms for referral to appropriate treatment, which may include an outreach coordinator or team to connect individuals receiving opioid overdose reversal drugs to follow-up services;
- Educate first responders and members of key community sectors about the need to follow standard safe operating procedures in instances of exposure to fentanyl, carfentanil, and other dangerous licit and illicit drugs.

Grants must be awarded to entities in both urban and rural areas, and the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) must conduct an evaluation to assess the number of first responders and members of other key community sectors equipped with overdose reversal drugs or devices; the number of opioid and heroin overdoses reversed by first responders and members of other key community sectors receiving a grant; the extent to which individuals and families receive information about treatment services; and the number of first responders and members of other key community sectors trained on safety when exposed to illicit substances.