

DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH

State of Mississippi

239 North Lamar Street
1101 Robert E. Lee Building
Jackson, Mississippi 39201



601-359-1288
FAX 601-359-6295
TDD 601-359-6230

Wendy D. Bailey - Executive Director

Dr. Paul,

Stand Up, Mississippi needs your help. Nearly 92,000 individuals in the U.S. died from a drug-involved overdose in 2020 - [averaging 252 lives lost per day](#). Here in Mississippi, we are seeing an alarming spike in drug overdose deaths in recent years. Perhaps most frightening is that Mississippians – many of them our young people - are dying at consistently increasing rates each year.

At [Stand Up, Mississippi](#), we believe the University of Southern Mississippi can play a vital role in preventing opioid overdoses amongst your students by raising awareness about the deadly risks associated with taking opioids and other medications not prescribed to them.

As an institution for higher learning, we invite USM to join us in participating in International Overdose Awareness Day on Wednesday, August 31.

Participation in **International Overdose Awareness Day** can range from:

- Encouraging students and staff to wear purple (the official color of addiction recovery) on August 31st
- Handing out educational materials and local addiction resources
- Posting flyers with helpful information around campus
- Or even inviting speakers and local government leaders to attend a rally. These resources and more can be found at www.overdoseday.com

The rising concern of fentanyl: Even though we have seen an impressive drop in opioid prescriptions - counterfeit drugs are infiltrating our communities and becoming an overriding concern. Drug traffickers manufacture pills almost identical to Adderall, Oxycodone and Xanax. However, according to the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), these counterfeit pills may contain lethal amounts of fentanyl, heroin, or methamphetamine. Just two grams of fentanyl – about the size of a few grains of salt – can kill an unsuspecting user.

We need all the help we can to spread the message that one pill can be deadly, and the best way to prevent an overdose is to avoid taking any - unless prescribed by a licensed professional. The good news is that recovery is indeed possible, and if we work together, we absolutely can decrease the number of opioid overdoses and overdose-related deaths in our state.

Stand Up, Mississippi is a statewide initiative of the Department of Mental Health (DMH) and focuses on ending the opioid crisis in our state and lessening the stigma associated with the disease of addiction. In partnership with the Mississippi Bureau of Narcotics, our goal is to educate Mississippians about the dangers of using opioids and helps those who need substance abuse treatment.

Dr. Paul, thank you for taking the time to consider joining Stand Up, Mississippi, as we reach out to young people about the dangers of taking counterfeit and non-prescription pills. I hope USM will join us in recognizing International Overdose Awareness Day and will be happy to field questions or talk with you about any plans you are considering. Please, feel free to contact Stand Up, Mississippi's Outreach Coordinator, Charlotte Bryant, at 601-359-6176 or Charlotte.Bryant@dmh.ms.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'W. Bailey', with a stylized, looping flourish at the end.

Wendy Bailey
Executive Director
Mississippi Department of Mental Health