

Congresswoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Health Subcommittee Hearing
December 2, 2021
Opening Statement
As Prepared for Delivery

INTRO

Fentanyl and fentanyl-related substances are killing a record amount of Americans.

Making sure these deadly poisons are permanently made illegal requires urgent action.

Lives are on the line.

PATIENT STORY

An unthinkable amount of fentanyl and its analogues are coming across our border—enough to kill every American 7 times over.

According to the CDC's National Center for Health Statistics, there were over 100,000 drug overdose deaths in the United States from April 2020 – 2021.

In my home state of Washington, the overdose death rate increased by more than the national average at about 35.7%. All because of fentanyl and its many analogues.

I want to share a story about someone from my community—where in Spokane the illicit drug market is completely flooded with fentanyl.

Allan had battled addiction and despair since he was a child. He recently had lost his job, relapsed, and unfortunately overdosed on heroin.

The paramedics administered Narcan to save his life and he woke up in an ambulance.

He later learned that the heroin he consumed was laced with fentanyl.

He was lucky. He survived.

And each time Allan uses, he's playing a game of Russian roulette with his life because fentanyl and its analogues are everywhere.

As of this year, the DEA has seized a record number - 9.5 million fake prescription pills containing lethal amounts of fentanyl.

More counterfeit pills have been seized so far in 2021 than the previous two years combined, with two out every five pills containing a potentially lethal dose of fentanyl.

This is not your typical street drug - this is weapons-grade poison that is killing our children.

I learned another story about a young woman in my district named Kayla. She and a friend split what they thought was a Percocet [PERK- a- SET] tablet.

That one pill, which was laced with fentanyl, immediately killed them both. They had no chance.

BIDEN PROPOSAL

For people like Allan and Kayla, Republicans have been trying to permanently place fentanyl related substances in schedule I.

We are hearing from an army of parents every day. Parents who deserve justice because they've lost a child... and they don't want anyone else to experience their pain.

The Biden Administration agrees that we should permanently schedule fentanyl related substances in schedule I.

The Biden recommendations also support more research into innovation to detect dangerous drugs like fentanyl and treat those with substance use disorders.

That is where we agree.

Unfortunately, this administration is also trying to treat these deadly poisons differently from fentanyl and other currently scheduled fentanyl analogues.

The Biden administration is proposing to exempt the entire class from trafficking mandatory minimums.

This would prevent our law enforcement from finding and putting away drug traffickers who are bringing these chemical weapons across the border.

For the parents we are fighting for, it would mean the **criminals** who killed their kids could keep trafficking these lethal substances with lower repercussions.

Surely there is bipartisan support to deliver justice for these families.

We should be working together to punish those who make, import, and distribute these poisons to our children, and help those with substance use disorders find treatment and recovery.

Congress has worked together on the SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act.

In addition to permanently scheduling fentanyl analogues, I stand ready to work together again reauthorize key programs at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration that expire next year to help get treatment for those who need it.

We need to take this urgent action on fentanyl analogues. It is too deadly a substance to be weak on traffickers and those who sell it to children in our communities.

CLOSING

Democrats released text this morning kicking the can yet again, temporarily extending fentanyl related substances in Schedule I until February 18.

I remain deeply concerned that Democrats will not make this permanent and, come February, will let it expire, tying law enforcement's hands in their battle to keep this poison out of our communities, or will simply kick the can another few months.

Congress needs to make permanent the fentanyl analogues ban immediately, along with the existing criminal penalties.

Parents, communities, and our constituents need it.