

## **Opening Statement for the Honorable Brett Guthrie**

*As Prepared for Delivery*

### **“Lives Worth Living: Addressing the Fentanyl Crisis, Protecting Critical Lifelines, and Combatting Discrimination Against Those with Disabilities”**

**February 1, 2023**

As we turn the page on both 2022 and the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress, thousands of Americans and their families are still reeling from failures by this Administration and the last Congress to meaningfully address one of the greatest public health threats of our lifetimes: the fentanyl crisis.

Over the past several years, the United States has seen an historic rise of drug overdoses, driven by an increased supply of synthetic opioids, such as illicit fentanyl analogs. In 2021 alone, there were over 107,000 drug overdoses reported, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and over 60,000 of these were caused by synthetic opioids. My home state of Kentucky experienced a 14 percent jump in drug overdose deaths between 2020 and 2021, with over 70

percent of these deaths being caused by fentanyl alone. You sadly cannot go a week without reading or hearing about stories of mothers, sons, sisters, brothers, cherished friends, and even babies, losing their lives to a fentanyl overdose.

How could this be possible? Well don't have to look farther than the crisis right now at our southern border. Since October of last year, our border patrol authorities have already seized over 7,000 pounds of illicit fentanyl at our Southwest Border. This is on top of the over 14,000 pounds of illicit fentanyl seized the year prior. The dual crises, both the fentanyl and border crisis, have effectively turned every community across the United States into a border community.

Fortunately, this very subcommittee has the ability to take action and do what we know will work to help keep illicit fentanyl out of our communities and save lives. One of the bills before us here today, H.R. 467, the Halt All Lethal Trafficking of Fentanyl Act, also known as the HALT Fentanyl Act, would take the critical step of permanently scheduling all fentanyl-related substances as Schedule I drugs under the

Controlled Services Act. Congress has enacted temporary extensions several times over the last few years. These continued temporary solutions are not sustainable – we need a permanent solution and must pass the HALT Fentanyl Act now. Doing so will be my top priority for as long as I am Chair of the Health Subcommittee.

To be clear, I want to acknowledge that we must also address the demand for illegal and dangerous drugs here in the United States. We will have an opportunity later this year to reauthorize key parts of the SUPPORT Act, and be able to examine how to get people into recovery and keep them safe. But if we've learned anything over the past few years, it's that these illicit fentanyl analogs are an entirely different class of drugs than any other deadly substances that our country has faced thus far and have the ability to make other illegal drugs that much more lethal.

Further, *The Block, Report, and Suspend Suspicious Shipments Act*, introduced by one of our newest Subcommittee members Representative Harshbarger, would also address the overdose crisis. This bill would

require drug manufacturers and distributors to report all suspicious of controlled substances to the Drug Enforcement Agency and require these entities to decline to fill such orders. Fighting the overdose epidemic necessitates a multipronged approach and a strong partnership between the public and private sectors, which this legislation accomplishes. I thank Representative Harshbarger for leading on this issue.

The other important piece of legislation before us today are equally as focused on protecting the sanctity of life. The 9-8-8 Lifeline Cybersecurity Act would ensure that the lifesaving 9-8-8 suicide and crisis hotline is protected from cyber vulnerabilities. This comes after the lifeline suffered a cyber-attack, in early December, which resulted in an hours-long outage of the lifeline. This cannot happen again, and I look forward to moving this bill through committee.

Finally, we are examining legislation to permanently ban the use of quality-adjusted life years in all publicly funded health care programs, like Medicare and Medicaid. It is long overdue for Congress to take the necessary step of banning QALYs, which the Protecting Health Care for

All Patients Act that's before us today would finally achieve. Such policies arbitrarily put a value on someone's life and are especially discriminatory toward those living with disabilities. A life worth living is always a life worth saving, regardless of someone's health status. I know this bill is personally very important to Chair Rodgers.

I urge all of my colleagues on the subcommittee to support these four bills before us today.

Thank you, and I yield back.