

Summary of Major Points for the Record
Sheriff Dennis Lemma
Seminole County Sheriff's Office (Florida)
Past President, Major County Sheriffs of America (MCSA)

Hearing Before the House Committee on Energy and Commerce
Subcommittee on Health
“Policies to Protect Our Communities from Illicit Drug Threats”

March 26, 2026

Today's illicit drug supply is more potent, deceptive, and unpredictable than ever before.

Individuals increasingly believe they are taking legitimate prescription medication when, in reality, they are ingesting counterfeit pills often laced with fentanyl or other synthetic substances. In many cases, a single exposure can be fatal.

The modern drug market is defined by synthetic substances, counterfeit pills, and polysubstance mixtures that make it difficult for users to know what they are consuming and complicate emergency response efforts.

Xylazine, a veterinary sedative increasingly present in the illicit drug supply, does not respond to naloxone, making overdoses more difficult to reverse and increasing the risk of fatal outcomes.

Nitazenes represent a rapidly emerging class of highly potent synthetic opioids that can equal or exceed the strength of fentanyl and are often designed to evade existing drug scheduling laws.

7-hydroxymitragynine, commonly referred to as 7-OH, a potent kratom derivative that acts on opioid receptors and can produce effects significantly stronger than morphine while being marketed as a legal or natural alternative.

Congress can help address these evolving threats by closing regulatory gaps, including scheduling substances like xylazine, adopting class-wide scheduling approaches for nitazenes, and strengthening oversight of pill press equipment used to manufacture counterfeit drugs.

Programs such as the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTA) initiative are essential for coordinating intelligence sharing and joint enforcement operations across federal, state, and local agencies.

The drug crisis also requires a balanced strategy that includes prevention, treatment, and enforcement. Sheriffs and local law enforcement agencies frequently serve as the first point of contact for individuals experiencing addiction or mental health crises.

Local correctional facilities increasingly function as the front line of this crisis, creating an urgent need for expanded treatment access, diversion programs, and stronger reentry support to improve outcomes and reduce recidivism.

Addressing the drug crisis will require sustained coordination between Congress, federal agencies, and state and local law enforcement to keep pace with evolving substances, strengthen enforcement tools, and expand access to treatment and recovery services.