



May 13, 2026

Annabelle Huffman
Legislative Clerk
Committee on Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Responses to Questions for the Record – “Policies to Protect Our Communities From Illicit Drug Threats”

Dear Ms. Huffman:

Please accept the attached responses to the Questions for the Record submitted following the Subcommittee on Health hearing entitled “Policies to Protect Our Communities From Illicit Drug Threats,” held on March 26, 2026.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Subcommittee and participate in this important discussion regarding the evolving challenges posed by fentanyl, synthetic opioids, and emerging illicit drug threats impacting communities across our nation.

I appreciate the Committee’s continued attention to these critical public health and public safety issues. On behalf of the Seminole County Sheriff’s Office and the Major County Sheriffs of America, I remain committed to supporting collaborative approaches focused on prevention, enforcement, treatment, education, and community safety.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should any additional information or clarification be needed.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dennis M. Lemma". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Dennis" being the most prominent part.

Dennis M. Lemma
Sheriff
Seminole County, Florida

The Honorable Gus M. Bilirakis (R-FL)

Can you elaborate further on the challenges in enforcement against gas station supplements like 7-OH?

One of the biggest challenges we face with products like 7-hydroxymitragynine, or what many people simply refer to as “7-OH,” is that the marketplace has moved far faster than the law and public awareness.

In Florida, and really across the country, these products are often being sold openly in convenience stores, smoke shops, vape stores, and online marketplaces under the appearance of being legal wellness or supplement products. To the average parent, consumer, or even a young person, the packaging can look no different than an energy supplement or over-the-counter product. Yet many of these products can produce potent opioid-like effects.

From an enforcement standpoint, that creates several problems.

First, there is the legal ambiguity. Law enforcement works best when there are bright-line standards. With 7-OH products, we are often dealing with a patchwork of regulations, varying interpretations of what constitutes a lawful hemp or kratom-derived product, and rapidly changing chemical formulations designed to stay ahead of regulation. By the time one product is identified and addressed, another slightly modified version is already on the shelf.

Second, there is the issue of product concentration and labeling. We are seeing products marketed as “natural” or “plant-based,” but the potency can be dramatically concentrated beyond what most consumers realize. In many cases, the labeling is inconsistent, misleading, or lacks meaningful dosage transparency. Our deputies encounter situations where individuals have no understanding of what they actually consumed.

Third, these products are widely accessible to young adults and teenagers. Unlike traditional controlled substances that operate primarily in illicit markets, these products are often sold in brightly lit retail environments that create a false sense of safety and legitimacy. That presents a major prevention challenge for families, schools, and communities.

Another significant issue is the difficulty in prosecution and regulation. Many existing statutes were not written with these emerging synthetic or semi-synthetic compounds in mind. Prosecutors and law enforcement agencies are often forced to rely on laws that were designed for entirely different drug categories. That can create inconsistency in enforcement and uncertainty for retailers, investigators, and the courts.

Why is action on H.R. 8000, *END 7-OH Act*, needed now?

Action on H.R. 8000, the END 7-OH Act, is needed now because we are watching a dangerous pattern repeat itself in real time. We have seen this before with synthetic cannabinoids, bath salts, fentanyl analogues, and other emerging substances that entered the marketplace faster than government, public health systems, and law enforcement could respond.

Today, synthetic 7-OH products are being sold openly in gas stations, vape shops, smoke shops, and online with little consistency in potency, labeling, age verification, or oversight. Many consumers believe these are harmless supplements because they are sold in legitimate retail environments. In reality, some of these products are highly concentrated and capable of producing opioid-like effects.

From a law enforcement perspective, waiting until the problem fully matures would be a mistake. In Florida, we have lived through the devastation of the opioid epidemic. We know what happens when highly addictive substances become widely normalized before the risks are fully understood. By the time overdose data, addiction trends, and criminal activity clearly emerge, communities are already paying the price.

What are the public health risks that you've witnessed directly in Florida as a result of 7-OH consumption?

What I would say is that this remains an emerging issue, and I want to be careful not to overstate what we definitively know at this stage. However, from a public safety and public health perspective, several concerning trends are emerging in Florida and across the country regarding highly concentrated 7-OH products.

One concern is the increasing availability and normalization of these products in retail environments. When substances with opioid-like effects are sold openly in gas stations, smoke shops, vape stores, and online marketplaces, there can be a public perception that they are inherently safe or low risk. That perception may not always align with the potency of some of the products being marketed.

We have also seen reports and anecdotal accounts involving dependency concerns, withdrawal symptoms, impaired behavior, and adverse reactions associated with highly concentrated formulations. While research is still evolving, these indicators warrant attention from healthcare professionals, public health officials, regulators, and law enforcement.

The Honorable Jay Obernolte (R-CA)

Sheriff Lemma, how often does your Department confiscate fentanyl or fentanyl related substances, and where do these substances come from?

Unfortunately, fentanyl has become a constant presence in our work. It is no longer an occasional seizure or isolated investigation. In Seminole County, and across Florida, our deputies encounter fentanyl or fentanyl-related substances on a routine basis through narcotics investigations, overdose responses, traffic stops, search warrants, jail intake screenings, and even seemingly low-level street crimes.

What makes fentanyl especially dangerous is not just the volume, but how deeply it has infiltrated the illicit drug supply. We are seeing fentanyl pressed into counterfeit pills made to resemble legitimate pharmaceuticals like oxycodone, Xanax, or Percocet. We are seeing it mixed into heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine, and other substances, often without the user even realizing it is present.

In terms of where it comes from, the overwhelming majority of the fentanyl impacting our communities originates from transnational criminal organizations, primarily Mexican cartels. Many of the precursor chemicals used to manufacture fentanyl are sourced internationally, often from China and other foreign chemical suppliers, then trafficked into Mexico where the substances are manufactured into powder or counterfeit pills before being smuggled into the United States.

Another troubling trend is the increasing sophistication of trafficking operations. Drug organizations now utilize encrypted communications, social media platforms, online payment systems, and sophisticated distribution networks that often resemble legitimate business operations more than traditional street-level trafficking.

Every single day, fentanyl and its analogues claim the lives of countless Americans. This crisis is not just numbers on a page; it is families torn apart and communities devastated. What can parents who are worried their children might be using fentanyl or other synthetic opioids do to help mitigate the risks of overdose and death?

First and foremost, parents need to understand that this crisis looks very different than it did even ten years ago. Many young people who overdose on fentanyl are not what most people would traditionally associate with addiction. In many cases, they are experimenting, taking what they believe is a prescription pill from a friend, or using a substance one time without realizing it contains fentanyl.

That is one of the most frightening realities of the synthetic opioid crisis. A single mistake can be fatal.

The first thing parents can do is maintain open and honest communication with their children. Conversations about drugs cannot simply be one-time lectures anymore. Young people need to understand that counterfeit pills are everywhere and that anything not obtained through a legitimate pharmacy should be considered potentially dangerous. What looks like Xanax, Percocet, or Adderall on social media or from a peer may actually contain fentanyl.

Parents should also pay attention to behavioral changes. Isolation, sudden mood swings, changes in friend groups, declining school performance, secrecy surrounding phones or online activity, sleep pattern disruptions, or unexplained financial issues can all be warning signs. None of these indicators alone mean a child is using drugs, but they should prompt conversations and involvement.

Another important step is education and preparedness. Families should familiarize themselves with naloxone, commonly known as Narcan. It is a life-saving medication that can reverse an opioid overdose if administered quickly. Many pharmacies, health departments, and community organizations in Florida provide naloxone without a prescription. Parents should not view carrying naloxone as enabling drug use any more than carrying a fire extinguisher encourages fires. It is about being prepared to save a life in an emergency.

The Honorable Erin Houchin (R-IN)

Would H.R. 2715's authority to order destruction of inventory help reduce the supply feeding those threats?

Yes, I believe the authority provided under H.R. 2715 to order the destruction of dangerous inventory would be an important tool in reducing the supply chain that is feeding many of these emerging drug threats.

One of the challenges we face today is that enforcement often lags behind the speed of the marketplace. When a dangerous synthetic substance or illegally marketed product is identified, there can be a lengthy process before it is removed from circulation. During that time, those products may continue to sit on store shelves, remain in warehouses, or be distributed online and shipped directly into communities.

From a practical law enforcement perspective, if a product is determined to pose a significant public safety risk, particularly products containing dangerous synthetic compounds or unlawfully marketed opioid-like substances, there should be a clear mechanism to remove that inventory from commerce quickly and decisively.

Otherwise, what we see is a cycle where products are seized in one location while identical inventory continues being sold elsewhere.

Should it be expanded to include pre-Import Alert inventory as well?

That is ultimately a policy decision for Congress, but I do believe there are important considerations on both sides of that discussion.

From a public safety perspective, one concern is that limiting destruction authority only to products imported after an Import Alert could leave large quantities of potentially dangerous inventory already inside the supply chain and available for sale. If a product is later determined to pose a significant health or safety risk, communities may still face exposure from inventory that entered the country before the alert was issued.