

Testimony

Congressman John Katko

Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, Homeland Security, and Investigations

Hearing on H.R. 2851, Stop the Importation and Trafficking of

Synthetic Analogues Act of 2017

Tuesday, June 27th, 2017

Thank you Chairman Gohmert, Ranking Member Jackson-Lee, and members of the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, Homeland Security and Investigations for allowing me to speak today about H.R. 2851, the Stop the Importation and Trafficking of Synthetic Analogues (SITSA) Act of 2017, a bill I recently introduced with Congresswoman Kathleen Rice from New York.

The synthetic drug epidemic has swept our nation and crippled communities in Central New York. Just a few weeks ago, Syracuse area hospitals saw a record number of overdoses due to synthetics abuse. First responders across the nation have seen incredible increases in calls due to synthetic overdoses. For example, in June of 2015, Washington, D.C. recorded 439 ambulance trips – resulting in 15 per day - related to synthetic drug abuse. Toxic, synthetic drugs are designed to mimic street drugs like marijuana, LSD, cocaine,

Ecstasy and other hard drugs. They can be more potent than the real thing and often times are more deadly. Unfortunately, when law enforcement encounters a specific synthetic drug compound, manufacturers of these substances are able to slightly alter the chemical structure of the drug. This puts law enforcement at a serious disadvantage and are constantly one step behind them. As a former U.S. attorney, but more importantly, as a father, getting these drugs off the streets and out of the hands of our loved ones remains a top priority for me.

Two weeks ago I met with a constituent in my district, Teresa Woolson, whose son was tragically killed by a synthetic drug identified as XLR-11. Unfortunately for Teresa, the drug that killed her son managed to remain legal and on the streets for 4 years after his death, until it was finally added to the Controlled Substances list.

While users of synthetics are certainly at risk for overdosing, we are now seeing local law enforcement and first responders put in harm's way simply by coming in contact with these dangerous substances. Numerous cases across the country have seen emergency personnel exposed to toxic and deadly drugs while responding to overdoses. This is both tragic and unacceptable, and H.R. 2851 is a positive step in eradicating these harmful substances from our communities.

The SITSA Act will give local law enforcement the necessary tools to target synthetic substances and the criminals who traffic them. Specifically, this legislation will create a new schedule to the Controlled Substances Act and establish a mechanism by which synthetic analogues can be temporarily or permanently added to that schedule in as little as 30 days after the chemical composition is determined by the Attorney General. The new schedule, Schedule A, will add 13 synthetic fentanyl analogues that have been identified by the DEA as an immediate threat to public health and safety. These synthetics have been confirmed as the cause of death in at least 162 cases in the United States. Finally, the bill maintains firm penalties for foreign manufacturing and importation and provides a multi-step sentencing process which includes application of existing federal guidelines. The goal of this legislation is to not only prevent drug abuse, but to facilitate proper research so that we may better understand these chemical compounds.

The stories of synthetic drug abuse are in no way limited to my area of the country; this is a nationwide epidemic. I respectfully ask this Subcommittee to consider the SITSA Act because every moment we fail to act; another person is effected by synthetic drugs.

Again, I thank you for allowing me to testify this morning and urge this Subcommittee to take action on H.R. 2851.