

TO: Members of the House Committees on Oversight and Reform and Energy and Commerce  
FROM: Lieutenant Rob Boothe Spokane Police Department  
RE: Fentanyl/ synthetic opioid crisis  
DATE: January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022

I am responding to your request sent out by the Republican members of the House Committees on Oversight and Reform, Energy and Commerce, and Judiciary who are investigating the unprecedented increase in overdose deaths to ensure this crisis does not continue. We are calling on you to provide any anecdotes or information regarding illicit drugs and particularly fentanyl.

I am a police officer for the city of Spokane, and have been an officer for over 28 years. I am currently a Lieutenant assigned as the unit commander of Tactical Operations in the Investigations Division. This assignment puts me in charge of our special investigations unit, the safe streets task force and the property recovery unit. The Sergeants and Detectives in these units are the front line units tasked with drug arrest, seizures, gang violence reduction.

I took this position 7 months ago. A mere seven months ago, the street value of a single counterfeit oxycodone pill laced with fentanyl (commonly referred to as a, "mexi") was anywhere between 15 to 30 dollars a pill. Currently the same mexi can be purchased for less than 2 dollars, and we have received information that the same pill can be purchased in Arizona for a dollar or less.

7 months ago, if a patrol officer or detective made an arrest of 50 pills it was a significant event. Just yesterday we made a seizure of over 50,000 pills. We routinely seize and purchase 1,000 pills with ease. The thousand pill purchases are considered a fall back arrest when larger deals fall through. These seizures and arrest have no geographic boundaries in our city, and are not isolated to any one economic status or class.

The volume of fentanyl pouring into our communities is growing at an exponential level with no foreseeable end in sight; in fact, our investigations would point to the direct opposite conclusion as we are beginning to seize and purchase the powder form of fentanyl. A logical chain of events could reasonably conclude that we have pill presses in our city that are beginning to produce their own pills. Every single one of them could mean an unintended death.

In addition to the volume of narcotics flowing into our community, the officers are trying to stem the tide without the ability to provide any deterrence. Under current state law, if an officer makes an arrest for possession of a controlled substance they issue a referral for treatment. After two separate referrals, the officer may now arrest the subject for a misdemeanor. The dichotomy is that much like the alcoholic that we contact during a domestic violence incident, who's partner is just wanting them to get sober, until they want to use and employ the techniques to get sober we can't force them to get better until they want to get better.

If you drive through my city you can see all of the individuals in crisis, not a single one of which we can force to get better. With the ease to purchase fentanyl laced products they will continue to be enslaved and victimized. When citizens encounter them, and they have no other resource, they will call the police as other social systems are unable to respond. And once again, the police are stuck in the middle with the tools to respond having been taken from them.

The lethality of fentanyl cannot be overstated. In addition to our patrol officers carrying their duty weapon, radio, TASER, and handcuffs they are all now issued Narcan as part of their standard load out. The Narcan is to assist not only those who have overdosed or been exposed to the fentanyl, but for the officers themselves who face exposure. I personally have been at two scenes in Spokane where officers had to be transported to the hospital after being exposed to fentanyl during the course of their duties. Officers don't have the luxury to know which hazard awaits them around the corner, and now in addition to gunfire, interpersonal violence, threats, civil unrest and a diminished lifespan they can add fentanyl exposures to the daily threats to can be exposed to. And despite all of this they answer the bell each and every single day.

The current data shows that in 2021 almost half of all of the overdose deaths are from fentanyl, which again knows no socio-economic boundaries.

As a result of this crisis, Former U.S Attorney for eastern Washington, William Hyslop has formed a public awareness group to combat fentanyl. Hyslop's group, which has members of the community

as well as myself, was created out of a mothers grief when her son overdosed on fentanyl. The group is working with the DEA on operation engage, a community outreach program to educate the community on fentanyl.



Lieutenant Rob Boothe #409 | Spokane Police Department | Tactical Operations  
(509) 209-4684 | [rboothe@spokanepolice.org](mailto:rboothe@spokanepolice.org)