

Testimony

Congressman John Katko

Subcommittee Health

Wednesday, October 11th, 2017

Thank you Chairman Burgess, Ranking Member Green, and members of the Subcommittee on Health for allowing me to speak today about the synthetic drug epidemic and my bill, H.R. 2851, the Stop

the Importation and Trafficking of Synthetic Analogues (SITSA) Act of 2017.

Synthetic drug abuse has crippled communities across this nation, leading to countless tragedies in places like my district. This year, Syracuse area hospitals saw a record number of overdoses due to synthetic drug abuse. In May, over 15 individuals had overdosed on synthetic drugs and were taken to the ER in the span

of 24 hours. Unfortunately, stories like this have become the new normal. First responders and emergency room physicians across the nation have seen incredible increases in calls due to synthetic overdoses, which is why they wholeheartedly support my legislation.

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 and begins to combat 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, leaving them constantly one step behind.

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.

Right before I introduced the bill, 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. This is unacceptable and these families deserve to see justice.

The potency and danger of synthetic drugs do not only threaten users, we are now seeing local law enforcement and first responders put in harm's way simply by coming in contact with these often lethal substances. Numerous cases across the country have resulted in emergency

personnel becoming gravely ill and even dying while responding synthetic overdoses.

The threats synthetic drugs pose to our communities and law enforcement must be stopped. H.R. 2851 takes a big step towards eradicating these harmful substances and protecting our communities.

The SITSA Act will give local, state, and federal 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 also 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.

This summer, the Judiciary Committee unanimously passed this bipartisan legislation. We have worked with members on both sides of the aisle as well as stakeholders across the law enforcement and health communities. I welcome your comments and amendments so that we can make this bill a powerful tool in eradicating these harmful substances.

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