

Fentanyl test strips help save lives

HB 2390

Thank you Chairperson Landwehr and other members of the House Committee on Health and Human Services

I believe this legislation will save lives.

My name is Janet Williams. I am here to support House Bill 2390 establishing the Kansas overdose fatality review board and excluding tests to detect the presence of fentanyl, ketamine, or gamma hydroxybutyric acid in a substance from the definition of drug paraphernalia. I work with people with brain injuries and I am a parent of two teenagers. I have both work and personal reasons to support this legislation.

As you know, fentanyl is becoming a major contributor to fatal and nonfatal overdoses in the U.S. In Kansas, more than 600 people died of fentanyl overdose in the year prior to September of 2021, an increase of 48.7%. We have started to see more nonfatal overdoses in Kansas, many of whom experience hypoxic brain injury caused by oxygen deprivation.

It only takes three to five minute of oxygen deprivation to cause a permanent brain injury. Although it's hard to quantify the extent of damage in relation to oxygen deprivation and time, the common effects of overdose-related brain damage include:

- Memory loss and the inability to concentrate
- Impairment of hearing and/or vision
- The loss of coordination, movement and balance
- The impairment or inability to read, write or communicate
- Continued oxygen deprivation can then lead to severe retardation, a vegetative state, and death

It is extremely likely that someone with brain damage as a result of fentanyl overdose would qualify for the brain injury waiver in Kansas. It is also likely that they may need lifelong care paid for by Kansans.

The cost of overdose is a Kansas taxpayer issue and, even more critical, a personal, family one.

I have two daughters who recently graduated from Shawnee Mission School district. The stories they have told me about the presence and availability of hard drugs in school and at many out of school activities makes my stomach hurt. You can't see fentanyl, you can't smell fentanyl, and you can't taste it.

It is impossible to know if any drug has been laced with fentanyl. That is why it is easy for so many to overdose on it, whether using it purposefully or accidentally.

They know 3 students who died of fentanyl overdose and can name other people who were saved by Narcan. We have discussed the ease of getting drugs for teens, that teens are way too pressured by their peers to fit in, and teens are experimenting with more and more illicit substances at younger and younger ages. Peer pressure, impulsivity and wanting to fit in are a lethal combination when kids don't really know what is in the substances they are being pressured to try. Saving one life would keep one family together, reason enough to pass this legislation. I believe this legislation could save even more.

I asked my youngest teen if fentanyl test strips would encourage drug use and she said, "No Mum, it would reduce overdoses. Kids who are going to use drugs are going to use drugs, whether the first time or tenth. Test strips would allow them to stop playing roulette. It makes no sense that we allow Narcan to revive someone but don't allow test strips to prevent the overdose to begin with." If we can keep these kids alive until they can get help if needed, we are doing a good thing.

This legislation would exclude fentanyl test strips off the list of drug paraphernalia so that any substance could be tested to make sure fentanyl isn't present. Fentanyl test strips are a valuable, lifesaving, and inexpensive tool that can give results in approximately five minutes – and perhaps that would be enough time for someone to decide to not use the drugs, or see that it has fentanyl and not take it for that reason.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Janet M Williams, PhD

7819 Conser Place

Overland Park, KS 66204

janetw@mindsmatterllc.com