

## Testimony U.S. Senate Panel on Synthetics

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Good morning. Thank you Chairs Senator Portman and Senator Carper along with all on this panel for giving me the opportunity to discuss this very important topic of how synthetic drugs such as Fentanyl and Carfentinal are destroying the lives of loved ones and our communities. In my 24 years of law enforcement I have never seen a substance cause such damage and devastation with its death rates that have risen to levels higher than car accidents and homicides combined. I have witnessed the power of drugs in my small community watching an entire family from the mother to her three sons wiped out. Three brothers an entire generation gone because of drugs, the last two brothers due to heroin.

Events such as this lead us to form the Hamilton County Heroin Coalition at a time when we were calling this an epidemic with an average of 20-25 overdoses and 1-2 deaths a week. In July of 2016 I received a call from the Greater Cincinnati Fusion Center a part of Homeland Security. A center that was originally designed after the 9/11 attacks for law enforcement to share intelligence on potential terrorists situations which could be analyzed and shared with local, state and federal law enforcement along with the public. Recognizing the centers ability to analyze data and share it quickly among various agencies we adapted its use for heroin. Tracking overdoses, locations and intelligence that could track trends on the street.

At 10pm that call told me, "Tom there is a new drug on the street called Carfentinal". I asked "what is Carfentinal?" The response was "we aren't sure; it is used to knock out large animals". I replied "like a pig", he responded, "no elephants". We passed this information onto the Coroner and County Health Commissioner trying to obtain as much information as we could to try and figure out what the introduction of Carfentinal on our streets would mean. What we learned about this drug was frightening. The top of the Fentanyl/opiate chain, potentially used in some chemical weapons the drug not intended for humans, so powerful that the equivalent of 2 grains of salt had the potential to kill a human. This drug 10,000 times more powerful than heroin was now on our streets leading us to issue a public warning so concerned not only for the user but first responders, hospitals, treatment centers and the public; all who could unknowingly be exposed to this extremely dangerous synthetic. We were so concerned for the safety of law enforcement we recommended stopping "field testing" of heroin which is a process needed to develop probable cause to arrest a person for possessing heroin, the officer's safety the priority over enforcement. This warning has reached other states such as Georgia and Florida who have also stopped this practice to ensure the safety of their officers. With all the dangers already facing law enforcement this danger which could be undetected

until it was too late was a danger that concerned the most hardened police veteran and lead police administrators to modify policies to protect their officers. We knew this drug was strictly controlled and monitored in the U.S. and with the assistance of the DEA we determined it was not coming from sources within the U.S.

We could have never anticipated that our epidemic would reach levels more along the line of a pandemic and become the new normal. In the week of August 19-27 2016 an event occurred that would forever change the heroin epidemic in our area when the hardest hit, Cincinnati experiencing nearly 200 overdoses and 3 deaths in one week. Seeing and hearing from dealers and users alike that there was nothing on the streets than synthetic drugs like Fentanyl and Carfentinal we experienced the literal shift from the “organic” opiate of heroin to the synthetic opiate of Fentanyl all of its derivatives and Carfentinal.

This shift in synthetics is testing the limits of users, first responders, the systems of government, hospitals and the spirit of each person who no matter drawn in by choice or necessity is to the point of breaking. I not only witness this devastation but the determination of those same people who day in and day out try to keep up with the new “normal”, the new average of 50-70 overdoses and 4-5 deaths a week. Moments of “spikes” where 70 overdoses occur in one weekend, 11 people die in one weekend, and multiple people overdose at the same time in the same location. At times overdoses which reach to nearly 40 in one day stretch the resources of even large police and fire departments such as Cincinnati who in one district with its 20 officers had 16 on overdoses and 4 on shootings, causing every officer to be unable to respond to other calls. In 2012 our area had 7 deaths that were Fentanyl related, in just three years that number exploded to 238 in 2015. The numbers continue to rise at an alarming rate. From January 1<sup>st</sup> of this year to April 30<sup>th</sup> our area has had almost 230 overdose deaths. In that short 4 months that number equates to half of the total deaths of 403 we saw in all of 2016.

Heroic efforts by many who have initiated innovative programs such as quick response teams that try to connect users to treatment, the Coalition issuing Narcan to every first responder who in 19 months has used over 7500 kits Narcan. The sheer volume of numbers has lead us to follow the mantra of the Starfish parable where a young boy was walking down the beach where thousands of Starfish had washed up. The young boy would pick up a Starfish and throw it into the sea and go to the next one. An old man seeing this stopped the boy and said “young man there is too many to make a difference and you can’t save them all”. The young boy picked up a Starfish, throwing back into the sea replied; “I saved that one”. This description we follow is beautiful in its nobility and heartbreaking in its reality, describing where we are right now with this epidemic.

But no matter how great our efforts, our initiatives our determination the tremendous influx of such powerful synthetics such as Fentanyl (which illegal labs have altered the molecular structure of the Fentanyl into even more powerful derivatives which our Coroner Office has identified at least 10 variations Fentanyl) and the current ultimate on the opiate scale of Carfentinal have rendered each initiative less effective forcing us to change our beliefs in order to keep up with its power. The original 2mg Narcan we issued to over 1000 police officers now obsolete having to replace with a higher concentration of a 4mg dose of Narcan which often due to the strength of the synthetic require multiple doses. It is more common to hear of user's unconscious taken to the hospital being placed on a constant Narcan drip in order to keep them alive.

These synthetics now so engrained in the user and our area that when we think the situation cannot get more difficult, cause even more fear, dealers insensitive to the damage they are causing to the user and our communities have now began to place these synthetics in other drugs like cocaine. This will not only cause more overdoses but deaths due to the cocaine users body not accustomed to not only general opiates but especially ones as strong as Carfentinal. Carfentinal now so common in our drug supply a staple in the heroin supply is now expanding. Just a couple weeks ago 4 people in Cincinnati who bought what they thought was just cocaine all overdosed, 2 died on the scene and 2 left in critical condition on Narcan drips due to that cocaine also containing Fentanyl and Carfentinal. That same week in my small community a mother drove her 10 month old baby into a driveway where she got out and collapsed. Neighbors called 911 brought the baby inside where as officers arrived the mother regained consciousness. She believing she had only purchased heroin found that she was actually given a mixture of cocaine, Fentanyl and Carfentinal.

I commend this panel for taking the time to hear, investigate and look into ways to help reduce these powerful synthetics drugs from entering our country, drug supply and our communities. I plead with this panel to do all it can to help us by stopping this poison from even getting in. Although this will not stop addiction or stop every supply, each intervention that prohibits these synthetics from reaching the streets means first responders can get relief from the overwhelming numbers which has caused such stressors on them and our system we have coined a term working with the Ohio Attorney General called "first responder fatigue". Take this deadly ingredient from those who push these drugs on our streets so their potions become less powerful. Take this tool away from them so that the tools we are using can be given the chance to work. Reduction from these powerfully devastating synthetics would mean less people would overdose; the numbers of deaths would be reduced which for us is never lost that each of those numbers is a person. A person who has a mother, father, brother, sister, son or a daughter who will forever grieve the loss of their loved one.

Thank you for allowing me to speak on this subject and I commend you for your compassion to want to help all of us in making the lives of those we serve better.