



State of Connecticut

SENATE

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SENATE REPUBLICAN OFFICES

Testimony
Children's Committee
Senator Craig Miner
March 1, 2022
House Bill No. 5244

Senator Anwar, Representative Linehan, Senator Kelly, Representative Dauphinais and members of the Children's Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill No. 5244 An Act Concerning the Provision of Opioid Antagonists in Schools.

The opioid epidemic is a public health and public safety crisis in Connecticut. It has destroyed lives and taken the lives of far too many. Illicitly manufactured fentanyl has caused this crisis to explode even further. Deaths from overdoses, and particularly overdoses from fentanyl, are increasing at alarming rates.

In 2020, the Chief Medical Examiner confirmed 1,374 overdose deaths, up 14% from 2019 and 84% involved fentanyl. Early estimates show another rise in 2021.

The news earlier this year of a child's death as a result of fentanyl ingested while in school is a jarring wake up call. It is heartbreaking and unacceptable. No parent should experience that loss and pain. No child should see that happen to their classmate.

Combatting the opioid crisis and the deadly nature of Fentanyl requires a comprehensive approach with continued support for substance abuse treatment, access to lifesaving measures, and strong penalties for the trafficking of such a deadly substance.

I thank the committee for raising this bill which contains many elements similar to the proposals the Senate Republican Caucus has detailed in a proposal submitted to the Judiciary Committee.

Both this proposal and the Senate Republican proposal would authorize a school nurse or qualified employee to administer opioid antagonists in schools in emergency situations and would require that at least one qualified individual is on school grounds during school hours. Both proposals also include language addressing state funding for opioid antagonists so that the financial burden does not fall to our schools and does not become a barrier to accessing this lifesaving emergency measure.

However, the current proposal raised by the Children's Committee does not make grants available to boards of education until next fiscal year (fiscal year ending June 30, 2023). I believe we need to make funding available immediately and we must work together to prioritize funding the state has available today to provide this emergency measure as soon as possible.

While not under the direct purview of this committee, Senate Republicans have also proposed investing in a public awareness campaign on the dangers of fentanyl and increasing penalties for the illegal sale of fentanyl to give law enforcement another tool to get these drugs off our streets and save lives. Under current law, fentanyl

and fentanyl analogues are defined as narcotics, and therefore the law treats all illegal fentanyl sales the same as any narcotic. But fentanyl kills at a far greater rate and with far more potency than other narcotics. Fentanyl is up to 50 times more powerful than heroin. It is deadly in even smallest of quantities, with the Drug Enforcement Administration estimating that even tiny doses, as little as two milligrams, the size of two grains of salt, is a fatal dose for most people.

I share this information because it emphasizes the severity of the issue we face in keeping our children safe.

Once again, I thank the Children's Committee for your attention to this matter. We must work together to move this forward quickly and identify immediate funding available to help our schools potentially save lives. It is devastating that we are even having a conversation like this today, but we must act, and we must do so quickly.

Thank you for the opportunity to share this input today.