

The Fight Against Fentanyl

Investments to Protect American Families

A Note from the Chair:

“There is a plague afoot in our nation, a plague of drug addiction and death the likes of which this country has never witnessed before.”

U.S. Senator Chris Murphy (3/29/23)
Chair of the Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee

THE PROBLEM:

In less than a decade, the number of deaths attributed to synthetic opioids (of which fentanyl accounts for 90%) has increased by nearly 200% – from roughly 65 people a day to 192 people a day. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there were more than 56,000 deaths involving synthetic opioids in 2020. In 2021, that number increased by 25% to over 70,000 American lives lost.¹ The ease and low cost of production of illicitly manufactured fentanyl makes it an attractive commodity to transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) trafficking in humans, narcotics, and weapons. Its potency combined with availability has made it one of the deadliest drugs in existence. Fentanyl is up to 50x stronger than heroin and 100x stronger than morphine. Just two milligrams, roughly the size of few grains of salt, can lead to a fatal overdose.²

¹ Wide-ranging online data for epidemiologic research (WONDER). Atlanta, GA.: CDC, National Center for Health Statistics; 2021. Available at <http://wonder.cdc.gov>.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, https://www.cdc.gov/stopoverdose/fentanyl/pdf/Fentanyl_Fact_Sheet_508c.pdf.

Other drugs such as heroin, cocaine, and methamphetamine are frequently adulterated with fentanyl, made into pills and sold in communities in every state in our country.

STATE OF PLAY:

Two agencies within the Department of Homeland Security play critical roles in combatting fentanyl and related TCO trafficking – U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and Homeland Security Investigations (HSI). CBP is responsible for securing our borders and facilitating legitimate trade and travel at ports of entry. When CBP identifies or interdicts illicit goods at the ports, HSI steps in to disrupt TCOs and investigate the origins of the seizure in order to ensure prosecutions occur and smuggling schemes can be identified.

As Chairman of the U.S. Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security, Senator Murphy is laser-focused on writing a budget that scales up DHS capabilities to stop the importation of fentanyl into the United States. For the first time ever, he secured dedicated funding in the FY23 omnibus spending bill to expand CBP's outbound operations that deny TCOs their "profits" and work toward disrupting their business operations (which rely on weapons trafficked across the southern border from the U.S. to Mexico). The connection between firearms and fentanyl is clear and a key part of the business operations of TCOs. The FY23 budget also included funding to hire more CBP personnel, strengthen non-intrusive inspection (NII) systems, and expand HSI investigations. While the number of deaths is rising, the number of seizures is reaching record highs thanks to these investments. In FY22, CBP seized 14,700 pounds of fentanyl compared to 13,900 pounds seized in just the first half of this fiscal year. CBP is on track to nearly double the number of seizures by the end of FY23. More than 90% of fentanyl seizures made so far this fiscal year have come at ports of entry and international mail facilities in the U.S.

THE PROPOSAL:

This proposal builds on recent progress and identifies areas to accelerate efforts within DHS to take a significant leap forward in the fight against fentanyl and the TCOs trafficking in narcotics, humans, and firearms. The proposal includes a menu of new investments at the Department of Homeland Security that would significantly increase existing operational capabilities, fully deploy previously funded assets, and expand current efforts to improve the accuracy and efficiency of scanning technology. The impact of these investments would:

- **Protect American Families** through improved detection and seizure of fentanyl at ports of entry and international mail facilities to prevent entry into the U.S.
 - **Goal: Increase the percentage of incoming passenger vehicles scanned from 40% to 65%**
 - Hire 500 additional CBP Officers at ports of entry, additional intelligence analysts, and new canine units
 - Fund additional NII equipment
 - Provide resources to forward operating labs at ports of entry to accelerate the identification of narcotics seized and the collection of forensics and for a joint Fentanyl Signature Lab with DEA and the Food and Drug Administration.
- **Dismantle Smuggling Networks** operated by TCOs by increasing the investigative footprint of HSI
 - **Goal: To support and expand cost effective approaches with proven track records of success.**
 - Expand key HSI Task Forces, such as the Fentanyl Abatement and Response Team (FAST) in San Diego, to target fentanyl collaboratively with state, federal, and local partners.
 - Ensure that HSI has the appropriate statutory authority to prioritize narcotics-related investigations at the border.

- Support the hiring of over 200 new HSI Agents and 100 support staff who are critical to the investigative mission at key locations including California and Arizona and where NII capabilities will be deployed, to ensure a cadre of well-trained agents are prepared to respond to geographic areas where most of the fentanyl is interdicted.
- **Prevent Profits from Going to TCOs** through expansion of outbound capabilities to seize currency, firearms, and ammunition heading to Mexico.
 - **Goal: Build from FY23 funding to triple the number of locations with dedicated outbound operations from three to nine ports of entry to increase seizures of currency, weapons, ammunition, and other contraband being trafficked across the southern border to Mexico in connection with the fentanyl trade.**
 - Fund additional NII at targeted ports of entry
 - Hire 100 additional CBP officers dedicated to outbound operations
- **Fight Fentanyl Abroad**
 - **Goal: To dismantle and disrupt fentanyl smuggling routes and to seize fentanyl by expanding our investigative footprint abroad, stopping fentanyl before it ever reaches U.S. shores.**
 - Add up to 10 additional Transnational Criminal Investigative Units (TCIUs), enhancing both the United States' and the host countries' ability to investigate and prosecute individuals involved in transnational criminal conduct.
 - Fund expanded HSI presence at nine additional locations abroad, including targeting geographical areas where precursors originate.
- **Safeguard Front-Line Agents, Officers, and Investigators**
 - **Goal: Ensure that tens of thousands of Departmental employees and the persons in their care are safe and healthy.**

- Increase funding for critical personal protective equipment, decontamination, and life-saving medications that reverse the impact of an accidental exposure to fentanyl.
- Increase funding for training to respond to accidental exposures in the workplace or the field.

In addition, we must support efforts to fully deploy and optimize existing NII systems through necessary civil work activities and development of Artificial Intelligence/Machine Learning capabilities to improve the efficiency of NII systems and their overall ability to identify and notify CBP officers of anomalies in NII images.

The investments proposed here will strengthen our nation's security and well-being, stem the flow of fentanyl into the U.S. and provide much-needed resources for the Department of Homeland Security to protect American families from the devastation fentanyl causes. The additional front-line officers and NII equipment alone has the potential to stop the entry of thousands of pounds of fentanyl and other narcotics into the U.S. While this proposal focuses on DHS, this is a fight that extends beyond the Department. Other Federal departments and agencies have critical roles in regards to law enforcement, investigations, prosecutions, treatment and prevention that are outside the jurisdiction of DHS. Continued and strengthened partnerships, information sharing, and joint operations are essential to marshal the full resources of the Federal government, state and local partners, and foreign governments.

"Fentanyl is the single deadliest drug threat our nation has ever encountered. Fentanyl is everywhere. From large metropolitan areas to rural America, no community is safe from this poison. We must take every opportunity to spread the word to prevent fentanyl-related overdose death and poisonings from claiming scores of American lives every day."

Administrator Anne Milgram
Drug Enforcement Administration