

Submitter: Ana Hilde
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure: SB238

Thank you for the opportunity to provide in person and written testimony. I am submitting the following information which was presented in person on 3/7/2023.

The graphs highlight the sharp increase in overdose mortality nationwide in adolescents ages 14 to 18 between 2019 and 2021 coinciding with the increase in illicit fentanyl. This data also reveals that American Indian and Alaska Natives as well as Latinx adolescents have seen the highest rates of increase. This data is from an article published in JAMA titled Trends in Drug Overdose Deaths Among US Adolescents by Friedman et al. (JAMA. 2022 Apr 12; 327(14): 1398–1400.)

In 2021, fentanyl was identified in 77.14% of adolescent overdose deaths, compared with 13.26% for benzodiazepines, 9.77% for methamphetamine, 7.33% for cocaine, 5.76% for prescription opioids, and 2.27% for heroin.

This data is in contrast with the perceived risk of adolescents related to different substances of abuse. This is outlined in the third slide that shows the mortality rate for fentanyl of 5.5 but the perceived risk at 27% compared to perceived risk of heroin and cocaine at 54 and 49% with much lower death rate.

Adolescents are more susceptible to harms of substance use due to the pattern of brain development. During adolescence there are considerable brain changes including earlier development of the amygdala (the emotion center) with much later development of the prefrontal cortex (area that controls thinking, planning, impulse control). Adolescents are therefore primed to be more impulsive with higher risk taking and less able to plan and pause to think. One of the ways that we can help our youth to make good decision is by providing them with accurate information and knowledge. SB 238 is a critical step to providing education to our youth so that they can make good, informed decision to protect themselves and their peers.

I am delighted that this bill includes educational programming for middle school students. In my extensive work with adults and youth with substance use disorders, both in residential and outpatient settings, almost all started to experiment with substances in middle school and some even earlier. It is imperative that we begin our prevention efforts in middle school and even consider appropriate programming in elementary school.

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