

Submitter: caren zucker  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: Joint Committee On Addiction and Community Safety  
Response  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3321

Dear Co-Chairs Prozanski and Kropf, Members of the Joint Committee on Addiction and Community Safety Response,

My name is Caren Zucker and I am writing to express my strong support for HB 2502, HB 3321 AND HB3375.

My son Jonah died at age 25 after being poisoned by fentanyl, in the aftermath of his death, as a journalist and producer, I produced a show on the dangers of drugs, particularly, fentanyl to honor him: "To Save a Life: A National Fentanyl Alarm," which aired on Scripps News.

I learned a lot about this lethal drug that I didn't know before. One of the most shocking things was that kids and young adults are unknowingly being exposed to fentanyl in alarming numbers — and many are dying as a result. Seventy thousand people die from fentanyl overdoses in the United States every year, making it the leading cause of death for people ages 55 and under.

We need to get the facts about fentanyl into the heads of people who do not recognize how it alone has increased the risk of death by drugs by orders of magnitude. Given that 22 American teenagers die from drug overdoses each week, with fentanyl involved 75% of the time, schools should be a priority venue for delivering the warning message. Good educational programs are struggling to get a foothold, however, either because local education leaders still don't understand the risks or are shying away from an issue that continues to carry enormous stigma. We must change this.

Exceptions do exist. After the fentanyl-induced deaths of four students in Beaverton, Oregon, in 2021, the school district worked with a parent-led organization, "Song for Charlie," founded to raise awareness of these dangers for families, teens, and young adults — to create a classroom program appropriate for children. It relies on the facts and does not sugarcoat them. Jennifer Hicks, the teacher who leads the program, explained, "I need them to understand you cannot trust a random pill. This is life or death. There's no experimenting with these substances." There have been no deaths from fentanyl in the Beaverton district since the program began.

Of course, there will still be some kids who don't heed the warnings or might be unaware of the danger and end up overdosing.

At that point, it may fall to the people with them — their friends and classmates — to save them. Education must therefore include instruction on how to recognize an overdose, why it is critical to call 911 and how to administer the drug naloxone, which immediately reverses the deadly effects of fentanyl.

Each day, when I think about my Jonah, I think about the many ways he might still be here if only he had understood the risks he took during a single night out with friends. If only I had known more about fentanyl and could have warned him about it. If only the friends he was with had recognized what had happened to him and called for help or administered help themselves.

None of that happened, and my Jonah is gone. But it's not too late to create a world where the warnings about fentanyl are so widely heard and understood that nobody would want to touch a "random pill" from a drug dealer. It's not too late to educate each other on the signs of an overdose, how to deliver help directly and when to call for help. I still believe this is all a possibility. But first, we need to talk about the danger. We need to teach about it.

By supporting these bills , you can help you will help save the lives of our kids.

Thank you for your help,  
Caren Zucker