

HB 2398 TESTIMONY
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WICHITA POLICE DEPARTMENT
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Good afternoon and thank you all for this opportunity.

I currently supervise the drug enforcement units of the Wichita Police Department. For years, the bulk of our work revolved around the sale of methamphetamines in our community. Starting in 2020, we began to see a dramatic shift away from meth towards a flood of illicit fentanyl on our streets. Counterfeit pills laced with fentanyl are being sold in bulk for as little as one dollar a pill and are being found with alarming frequency in Wichita. Additionally, fentanyl powder is being used to lace other drugs like cocaine, crack cocaine, meth and other illegal drugs. In 2022, our drug enforcement units seized over 240,000 suspected fentanyl pills. Last month alone, they seized over 30,000 pills.

As a result, people are overdosing on fentanyl almost daily and many are dying. Starting in 2020, fentanyl related overdose deaths in Sedgwick County began to climb dramatically. In 2018, there were 23 fentanyl related overdose deaths. In 2019, there were 28. In 2020, that number rose to 90 followed by 162 in 2021. The Sedgwick County Forensic Science Center is still working autopsies from 2022, but as of Friday there were 132 fentanyl related overdose deaths for 2022 and they still had over 262 autopsies waiting to be completed. The final number for 2022 is likely to rise to a new high.

We are in the middle of a shift in how law enforcement responds to this fentanyl crisis. We are building new relationships with substance use treatment providers in our community to better connect those suffering from substance use disorder with the help they need. While we are doing what we can to help the drug user, we need stiffer penalties for those who are trafficking fentanyl and poisoning our community. This is why the Wichita Police Department supports HB 2398.

Thank you and I will stand for questions.