

My name is Kelsey Santoro, and I am here today to speak in support of this bill that would bring fentanyl education and Narcan into our high schools. I am speaking not just as a student and a mother, but as someone with lived experience of addiction who knows firsthand how devastating the lack of education can be.

When I was in high school, substance use education was extremely limited. We were told drugs were bad and that we should just say no, but we were never taught what substances actually were, how addiction works, or how dangerous opioids like fentanyl could be. There was no honest conversation about overdose risks, contamination of drugs, or how quickly one mistake could become fatal. Narcan was never discussed, and we were never shown how a simple medication could save a life.

Because of this lack of education, many of us entered adulthood without understanding the real dangers. Like so many others, I struggled with substance use disorder. At the time, I didn't know how common addiction was, that it was a medical condition, or that fentanyl was being added to drugs without people's knowledge. I lost friends, witnessed overdoses, and lived in constant fear, all things that might have been prevented with proper education and access to lifesaving tools.

Fentanyl is now one of the leading causes of overdose deaths in our country. Young people are especially at risk because they are often unaware of how potent it is or that it can be present in substances they believe to be something else. Education saves lives. When students understand the realities of substance use, overdose risks, and how to respond in an emergency, they are far more likely to make safer choices and help others.

Providing Narcan in high schools is not encouraging drug use, it is acknowledging reality. Just like schools carry EpiPens for allergic reactions and AEDs for cardiac emergencies, Narcan is a safety measure. Overdoses can happen anywhere, including school grounds, and having trained staff and accessible Narcan could mean the difference between life and death.

If I had received real education about addiction and fentanyl when I was younger, my life could have looked very different. I might have made safer choices, recognized warning signs sooner, or known how to help someone in crisis. More importantly, I might have understood that asking for help was okay.

This bill represents hope, prevention, and compassion. It gives students knowledge, tools, and a chance at a safer future. It acknowledges that substance use disorder exists and that saving lives should always come before stigma or discomfort.

I am now in recovery and working toward a career in social work, so I can help others avoid the struggles I faced. But prevention is just as important as treatment. By passing this bill, you are giving young people a chance I never had, the chance to be informed, prepared, and protected.

I strongly urge you to support fentanyl education and Narcan access in our high schools. Lives depend on it.

Thank you for your time and for considering this important legislation.