



Proponent Testimony on HB 2487
House Corrections & Juvenile Justice Committee
Thursday, January 25, 2024

Chairman Owens and Members of the Committee,

The Kansas Department for Aging and Disability Services and the Department of Health and Environment support HB 2487 and urge you to vote yes. This legislation offers important protections to those suffering an overdose and bystanders who can seek help. The ultimate outcome of this bill is to save Kansans' lives.

Synthetic opioids are a broad class of man-made drugs that includes prescription pain medications, as well as illicitly manufactured or distributed opioids. One such synthetic opioid, fentanyl, is frequently prescribed legally for severe pain, but may also be manufactured or distributed through illegal means due to the demand for narcotics in the illicit drug supply. Fentanyl is often combined with other illicit drugs without the user's knowledge. <https://www.cdc.gov/opioids/basics/Fentanyl.html>

The Kansas Office of Vital Statistics identified 738 drug overdose deaths among Kansas residents in 2022 which is a 9 percent increase compared to the 678 drug overdose deaths in 2021. Of the 738 deaths in 2022, 497 involved an opioid as contributing to the cause of death (67 percent). Synthetic opioids (excluding methadone), the category that includes Fentanyl, were involved in 412 of the total deaths (56 percent).

Among Kansas residents, synthetic opioid involved overdose deaths have increased by 1014 percent over the 10-year period from 2013 to 2022 – from 37 in 2013 to 412 in 2022.

This increase in opioid overdose deaths has largely been impacted by the increase in synthetic opioid involved deaths, while deaths due to heroin or other natural and semi-synthetic opioids have remained relatively steady. For more information on drug overdose death and technical notes, visit the KDHE data dashboard here: <https://www.kdhe.ks.gov/1309/Overdose-DataDashboard>

Enacting a Good Samaritan Law in Kansas is another step the legislature can take to prevent unnecessary deaths from fentanyl. Legislation would increase the public's ability to respond to an overdose by removing the threat of civil/criminal penalties. Often, people are hesitant to contact emergency medical services in the case of an overdose because law enforcement tend to respond as well. Currently there is potential for arrest and/or prosecution of the person alerting EMS or the person overdosing because many aspects of the use of controlled substances remain illegal. The aim of Good Samaritan Laws is to encourage bystanders to seek help and to ultimately save lives. This legislation emphasizes that the state cares more about providing emergency care than incarcerating an individual who has overdosed or the person who has requested lifesaving measures for them.

Along with the decriminalization of fentanyl test strips and ability for the public to administer Narcan, this change provides another important tool in the fight to save Kansans from fentanyl overdoses. Law enforcement, EMS and the harm reduction communities unify and work together when community members feel safe calling for aid. These interactions can not only save lives but open up opportunities for Kansans who want to look for other options including treatment and recovery.