

Senate Bill 914

Hospitals – Overdoses – Testing for Fentanyl – Favorable

March 20, 2023

Chair Griffith
Senate Finance Committee
3 East
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Individual Providing Testimony: Caryl Siems

Position: Favorable

Thank you for considering SB 914 / HB 811,

We lost our son, Joshua Christian Siems, to a drug overdose on his 31st birthday. He had been using fentanyl and cocaine.

A few days into his stay at the ICU, we inquired as to his toxicology screen. Only the cocaine was revealed. We were perplexed. Didn't the reports test for opiates? Yes, but not fentanyl. That drug, fully synthetic, does not show on the standard toxicology screen. Our son's death would not be added to the "count" of fentanyl overdoses. This should concern everyone.

We know that overdoses from opiates included on the "Federal Five" have decreased significantly in recent years, while overdoses involving fentanyl have increased exponentially. The numbers are staggering. The numbers are wrong. We are in the midst of epidemic the scope of which we can only guess.

This bill is an attempt to bring us closer to truth. These deaths will still be undercounted. Admittedly, the opioid epidemic is complex and must be addressed by comprehensive multi-pronged strategies, which will require real work. We know the power of good information, as our daughter, Laney, has cystic fibrosis. The power of a robust data-sharing network has made a huge difference in the care, treatment, and drug developments that have more than doubled life expectancy since she was born. Can't we do the same for the disease of substance use disorder?

This is a drop in a bucket that, hopefully, will ripple out to create significant changes. How? From a public health standpoint, treatments, interventions, and drug development rely on knowledge and data. The data supports investment, both private and public. The data can alert us to concentrations of the drug in particular geographic areas. The data drives our behavior – medically, societally, politically.

This data, as we have seen with the impetus for the California law on which this bill is modeled, can also save lives. In that case, a young man, Tyler, could have received the proper treatment had the hospital tested him for fentanyl. In other words, he might still be alive. In addition, many drug users unwittingly ingest fentanyl. This can alert them to the sad fact that fentanyl can be in every street drug.

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Josh, yes, was an addict. He had a good job, a nice apartment, and a loving partner, friends and family. He was a bright light, talented and inquisitive, and a kind and giving soul. Four people were recipients of a new lease on life due to his organ donations. He would want his legacy to carry on in a meaningful way and help others. He never met a stranger. He loved with abandon.

SB 914, and its House crossfile, HB 811, give you the chance to tell your constituents you care about them - all of them. It is, in fact, an act of love. I can hear Josh's enthusiastic "Yes!!!" when this bill passes.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Caryl and Bob Siems