

Senate Bill 914 / House Bill 811

Hospitals - Overdoses - Testing for Fentanyl

Individual Providing Testimony: Dr. Roneet Lev, Emergency/Addiction Physician - Scripps Mercy Hospital San Diego, Executive Director – Independent Emergency Physicians Consortium, former Chief Medical Officer – White House Office of National Drug Control Policy; Emergency/ Addiction Physician

Position: Favorable.

Dear Chair Griffith and Members of the Committee,

As an emergency physician, I have the unfortunate perspective of witnessing our nation's opioid epidemic firsthand. The opioid epidemic is primarily driven by fentanyl that has infected a wide spectrum of the drug supply. Some victims have a substance use disorder, and others are unexpectedly killed because of a fatal mistake of using a drug that contained fentanyl. Hundreds of thousands of Americans have succumbed to fatal overdoses in recent years, the vast majority of caused by fentanyl. But fentanyl, a synthetic opioid, doesn't appear on the standard five panel drug screen utilized by most hospitals.

The good news is that fentanyl testing reagents are incredibly affordable, around \$.75 each, and can be easily integrated into currently utilized urine drug testing protocols. The bad news is that too many hospitals are failing to implement these procedures. According to research compiled by the University of Maryland's Center for Substance Use and Health Research, [only 5% of emergency room overdose patients are tested for fentanyl.](#)

This testing gap is why I helped author legislation in California that mandated fentanyl be included whenever a urine drug test is ordered. The legislation passed unanimously, was supported by a coalition of physicians and patient advocates, and, according to analyses carried out by California's House and Senate chambers, had a negligible fiscal impact.

The law is now in effect across all 350+ hospital in California, including those in rural settings. I offered my personal phone number to any hospital that needed technical assistance in implementing fentanyl testing and received only one inquiry during this period of implementation.

After reading HB 811, I knew that it championed the same commonsense and lifesaving policies that we enacted in California. It is my understanding the bill's Senate crossfile, SB 914, is being amended to match HB 811's language, and thus similarly has my full support.

Closing this testing gap could mean the difference between life and death for so many Marylanders. The data will engage the medical community in solutions for the fentanyl crisis. SB 914 would help public health authorities collect more data on the prevalence of the fentanyl in certain communities, provide better care to patients who either knowingly or unknowingly ingested fentanyl, and add minimal burdens to existing hospital procedures.

This bill has my full support and I encourage the committee to give the effort its full support. Thank you for your time and please let me know if you have any questions at my email, roneetlev@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Roneet Lev MD". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the "Sincerely," text.

Dr. Roneet Lev
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