

House Bill 811

Hospitals - Overdoses - Testing for Fentanyl

Individual Providing Testimony: Dr. Roneet Lev, 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 Peña-Melnyk,

As an emergency physician, I have the unfortunate perspective of witnessing our nation's opioid epidemic firsthand. Some people had a substance use disorder, and others without an addiction, were 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, an especially lethal synthetic, 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 to 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 rural settings. I offered my personal phone number to any hospital that needs technical assistance in implementing fentanyl testing, and received only one hospital that I assisted.

After reading HB 811, I know that it champions the same commonsense but lifesaving policies that we enacted in California. Closing this testing gap could mean the difference between life and death for so many Marylanders. The data will engage the medical community in the solutions for the fentanyl crisis. HB 811 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 investment 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,

Dr. Roneet Lev

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