

Good Afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen of the General Assembly. My name is Cassandra Beltran, and I am from Middletown, Maryland in Frederick County. I am a social worker, a mental health private practice owner, mental health advocate, and I'm also a victim of fentanyl overdose death.

Seven months ago at the young age of 30 my sister died. Kaela was a sister, a mother, a daughter, a niece, a cousin, and a friend. She was free spirited, kind, passionate, beautiful, and spunky. Kaela loved spending time at the park with her children, was always down for an adventure through the woods or at the river, and dreamed of becoming a sign language interpreter. The confidence Kaela had was everything I wanted to be, but that was before Fentanyl. After fentanyl entered her life she was empty, lost, scabbed, wounded, infected, homeless, and ultimately dead. Fentanyl devoured her despite her best efforts to survive and took away everything that made her who she was. She was sent to rehab and sober living right in the center of Baltimore, where she found "friends" to encourage her habit and destroy her sobriety, and a drug dealer on every corner to satisfy her need. She ended up in hospital with a broken leg and back, ready for help and a way out, and the system failed her, but a drug dealer didn't. He was there to provide the pain relief and comfort she felt she needed, but little did she know that drug dealer was going to be the last person she saw, because that dose of Fentanyl was going to kill her.

Her killers are still out there, roaming the streets with their weapon, fentanyl, harming and killing others, and something must be done. Let me ask you this, if someone entered your home, your child's school, or this room and pointed a gun at you or someone one you loved, would they not know pulling the trigger would cause serious bodily harm or death, and would we not expect that person to be arrested, charged, and punished? Someone selling drugs is no different. They are out there mixing drugs, chemicals, and garbage into the fentanyl they are selling knowing the sale of that drug will cause serious bodily harm or death, and if they happen to be caught what punishment will they face? A few years for possession, a few more for intent to distribute? Meanwhile your loved one dies alone, in a dirty alley, leaning up against a dumpster left like a piece of trash the way my sister did. My sister's life mattered and while she made the choice to buy the drugs, the dealer is not blameless in her death. The drug epidemic in this country is winning, and unless we all do something to stop it, your loved one could be next. This bill is a start, and it's your chance to take a stand with those of us whose loved ones can no longer be saved. Thank you for your time.