

I am writing in support of SB0906/HB1386 in Maryland.

My name is Jackie Long, mother of Ryan White, I am writing to share my testimony about losing my 30-year-old son Ryan and his girlfriend Stephanie to illicit fentanyl poisoning in November 2022. Ryan had so much to live for, he had an athletic background, career path, and will never be able to participate in our family vacations, celebrate another birthday, holiday, get married, have children or reach his career path dreams. Ryan had ongoing medical issues and was awaiting further testing for possible lymphoma. He was trying to get proper medical care and stabilize his life when he was sold a drug containing a lethal amount of illicit fentanyl. He never received the chance to recover, seek treatment, or even regret using a drug because illicit fentanyl took his life instantly. My point is he did not want to die; we know this by all the steps he was taking to fulfill his dreams and had an unexpected illness and turned to drugs whether it was to self-medicate, get high or both.

I am writing to support laws for stronger accountability for drug dealers who knowingly distribute substances contaminated with deadly fentanyl. Opposition has stated that users know illicit fentanyl is in the drug supply; well I can assure you, dealers know this too. This law is not just about incarcerating people with substance use disorder, but about holding suppliers responsible for deaths caused by the illicit drug supply. I urge lawmakers to pass legislation that strengthens consequences for distribution causing death or harmful bodily injuries while also improving access to rehabilitation programs, including for incarcerated individuals. My plea is grounded in the belief that stronger accountability will save users, potential users, and even dealers themselves.

Illicit fentanyl stole Ryan's chance at recovery and life itself, and I am asking lawmakers to hold dealers accountable in order to prevent further deaths and protect vulnerable individuals while still supporting treatment for those with substance use disorder.

We need a multi-tiered solution. Treatment is essential. Prevention is essential. Education is essential. But accountability for those who knowingly distribute deadly drugs must be part of that solution.

Opponents speak about the cost of incarceration. I ask: what is the cost of a life? What price would you put on your child? I would rather see money spent on rehabilitation in our correctional system than see another parent spend money on a funeral.

Please pass this law. Help us stop the revolving door of dealers and deaths. Hold those who distribute these lethal substances accountable while also expanding treatment and rehabilitation.

Please help save lives — the lives of those who struggle, the lives of those who experiment once, the lives of those who are self-medicating in pain, and even the lives of those who deal and could still turn their lives around.

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony.

