

**Statement of**

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President and Co-Founder of V.O.I.D.**

**Before the Committee on the Judiciary  
United States Senate**

**Hearing on  
“The Poisoning of America: Fentanyl, its Analogues, and the Need for Permanent  
Class Scheduling”**

**February 4, 2025**

Good morning, Chairman Grassley and Ranking Member Dick Durbin. My name is Jaime Puerta, and I am the President and Co-Founder of VO.I.D. “Victims of Illicit Drugs”, and Co-Chair of “Project Facing Fentanyl Now” and a Marine Corps Veteran as well as a small business owner in Santa Clarita, California. Accompanying me today are Mr. Steve Filson a retired Police Officer who is Secretary/Treasurer of V.O.I.D., as well as Ms. Andrea Thomas, Chair of Project Facing Fentanyl, and family members who have all lost a loved one to this illicit Fentanyl scourge.

V.O.I.D., Victims Of Illicit Drugs” is a California-based nonprofit, which was formed to bring to the public 's attention through education, awareness and legislative advocacy, the immediate danger of sudden death associated with the use of illicit fentanyl, and other emerging synthetic analogues. Today, I speak on behalf of our loved ones and hundreds of thousands more from across our nation who are no longer able to do so due to their untimely passing due to fentanyl poisoning.

Of those who are no longer able to speak for themselves is my 16 ½ year-old son, Daniel Puerta-Johnson. My son was not a habitual drug user by any sense of the word, nor had he been diagnosed with substance use disorder, but he was diagnosed with ADHD and depression.

On April 1st, 2020, at the very beginning of the pandemic, I walked into my son's room, and found him practically lifeless in his bed. In a state of shock and panic, I called 911 first, then his mother. Emergency services arrived at our home and

immediately began CPR and Naloxone was administered. He was then transported to Los Angeles Children's Hospital, where a team of specialty doctors did everything they could to bring our son back but unfortunately were unsuccessful in bringing him out of his catatonic state. His health had become much worse from the day that he had been admitted, and all they could do was to keep him comfortable until his mother Denise and I made the agonizing decision to discontinue all life support efforts. On April 6th, 2020, at 3:45 p.m. all life support was discontinued. His mother, Denise, got into his hospital bed and laid next to him, gently stroking his beautiful head of dark brown hair and I was holding his right hand when he drew his last breath at exactly 5:08 p.m. when he quietly passed away. I kissed the bridge of his nose like I did on most nights when saying good night and left the hospital to go home without my son utterly broken, devastated, angry, and confused.

After my son's passing, I was contacted by the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Office, and I was told that my son had died due to an overdose. Half a blue pill, which I later came to find out looked exactly like a pharmaceutical grade Blue M30 oxycodone pill, had been found on his dresser. It was sent to their laboratory for analysis and found that the pill which had taken my son's life was illicit fentanyl. My son had consumed what he thought was a blue M30 Oxycodone pill, but in fact, had unknowingly, I repeat, **UNKNOWINGLY** ingested an illicitly manufactured counterfeit opioid made of nothing more than filler, a binding agent and illicit fentanyl. This was deceptively made to look exactly like a pharmaceutical grade oxycodone pill, and it killed him.

When criminal organizations manufacture a pill that looks exactly like a pharmaceutical grade, OxyContin, Percocet, Xanax, Vicodin, Norco, Valium, Adderall, or worse yet, add illicit Fentanyl to Cocaine, Heroin or Methamphetamine without the end-user's knowledge or consent, and a man, woman, or child consumes any one of these drugs without knowing that they are consuming a lethal dose of fentanyl, and dies, this is not an overdose, but a poisoning!

While the dangers and risks of illicit fentanyl contamination of traditionally non-lethal drugs and the existence of counterfeit prescription pills are very well known in the substance use community, these dangers are not well known among those outside the substance use community, which puts the public and our children at grave risk.

According to a report that was published by UCLA Health on January 23, 2024, quote, “an average of 22 adolescents 14 to 18 years of age died in the U.S. each week in 2022 from drug overdoses, raising the death rate for this group to 5.2 per 100,000-- driven by illicit fentanyl in counterfeit pills, new research finds”, but we know for a fact that these statistics are flawed because not every death has been classified as a death caused by “drug toxicity”, and for the first time since World War II, the average life span of every single American, between the ages of 18 and 45, have actually dropped.

If Mothers, Fathers, School Administrators, Teachers, Counselors, or our Mental Health professionals or our society is not scared of illicit fentanyl yet, they should be! What everybody fails to realize is that their non addicted children, loved ones, students, or employees, could be affected by a one-time fentanyl use! Let that sink in for a second. People from all walks of life that are out there who want to study just a little bit harder and take what they think is a pharmaceutical Adderall, or are out Friday or Saturday night and want to have a little bit more fun, or are stressed out because of finals, or are having trouble with their relationships and just want to relax and take a Xanax, or are suffering from either emotional or physical trauma, can fall victim to this insidious poison! Any pill that is not prescribed by a licensed physician and purchased at an accredited pharmacy, is a counterfeit and there is no question about that. According to the DEA, all pills purchased through any social media app like Snap Chat, are counterfeit and last year they stated that 5 out of 10 pills are now potentially lethal; whereas years before that, it was estimated that 7-8 out of 10 pills were potentially lethal. Since there is no quality control in making these pills, there is no way to calculate how much illicit Fentanyl or a “Fentanyl Related Substance” is in each pill or batch made; therefore, it’s like playing “Russian Roulette” and it’s anyone’s guess of what is in it. One pill can truly kill a loved one, or someone you know. What’s worse yet, illicit Fentanyl has now been found in cocaine, black market cannabis, gummy bears, vapes, and wax pens.

This is why, it is imperative, that we educate our children on the dangers of any kind of drug use due to the lethality that can come with any kind of experimentation or self-medication, and we must have specific fentanyl education introduced to all our schools as soon as possible; otherwise, more children will surely die.

My son Daniel has not been the only one to die due to this scourge. His death is but a drop in the ocean compared to all who have lost their lives in this country due to Acute Fentanyl Poisoning, and what has truly fueled this epidemic of drug death are Social media platforms such as Snap Chat, Instagram, WhatsApp, or WeChat, etc., who actively allow low level drug dealers to sell their poison to unsuspecting victims, with absolute impunity due to protections afforded to them under Section 230 (c) of the Communications Decency Act of 1996.

Snap Chat, in my humble opinion has been the #1 driving force for the fastest growing and least recognized demographic for drug related deaths not only in Southern California where I live, but the rest of the nation! According to an article that was published in the Santa Clarita Signal on April 2, 2024, a group of math students from West Ranch High School from Santa Clarita, were named finalists in the "Modeling the Future Challenge", when the findings of their research project found that Snap Chat was a source of illicit fentanyl dealing and that by the year 2030, 90% of all illicit fentanyl related deaths in California would be directly linked to Snap Chat. This is an incredible finding.

On top of the harms and risk that social media platforms pose to our loved ones, in today's day and age, we have smugglers who are using "The De Minimus" loophole, in bringing in illicit imports of illicit fentanyl, pill presses and all sorts of "FRS's", avoiding American duty and regulatory regime. This, in and of itself is a massive problem for our National Security. The loophole incentivizes overseas vendors to avoid the tried and tested system of regular imports, which allows Customs and Border Protection to inspect packages and enforce our laws. Congress needs to close this loophole as soon as possible.

The US government needs to launch an all-out narco-war against the Mexican drug cartels who are manufacturing and trafficking illicit drugs, along with their Chinese Triad organized crime syndicate partners, and the Mexican government by levying heavy tariffs on every product imported into the United States from Mexico, tax every single remittance that is wired to Mexico from the United States, as well as intervene the banks that are laundering all the proceeds from this criminal enterprise between the Mexican Cartels and their Chinese counterparts, such as Banamex and BBVA. The scale and scope of the laundering activity inside our borders is huge, constituting the largest money laundering scheme in world history. Billions upon billions of drug dollars are being invested in illegal marijuana grows

here in the United States, real estate and other ventures and they need to be stopped. Statutes like RICO are tailor-made for enforcement against the Cartels and crime groups at the heart of this crisis, as well as complicit banks, communication and payment means such as WeChat, Snap Chat and Chinese money-brokers. We must also sanction the Chinese companies engaging in illicit exports of Fentanyl precursors as well as those financial actors engaged in laundering the drug proceeds for the cartels.

You are here today in reconsideration of a tool that will aid in the enforcement of laws surrounding the Controlled Substances Act, by placing Illicit Fentanyl into the classification it deserves. Illicit Fentanyl is a substance that has earned a place in the Schedule I category. It has no legitimate medical use and is highly addictive. As to the ability for continued medical research, the Acts language provides for that. For the past five years, we have listened as this legislation has been brought up for consideration in each session of Congress, only to be passed on to permit enforcement through a continuing resolution. We speak of governmental common sense and common sense needs to prevail in the consideration of this Act.

This is my opinion on some of the efforts that we can do to abate these senseless drug deaths. Dr. David Asher from the Hudson Institute said it best when he stated, quote: "China is engaged in a reverse Opium war against the West, with its top target US society. Defeating the Chinese in that war won't be easy, but it's far better to try, than to do nothing serious and accept the deaths of a hundred thousand children a year". Thank you for your time today and thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify.