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Robert Stevens: Don't Let Springfield Make Fentanyl Dealing and Overdosing Worse

(September 28, 2022 - Villa Park, Illinois) Opioid abuse has become a national crisis. It is a plague that is devastating our nation. It has touched every town and every family in America. Even prescription opioids are highly addictive and potentially dangerous.

The financial pressures our families and communities are struggling with add to this mental health crisis. Suicides and overdoses now outpace COVID deaths 10 to 1 in our county. The DEA reports that the top cause of death in 18 to 45-year-old Americans is opioid overdoses.

The biggest opioid killer is fentanyl, a cheap synthetic drug that is 50 times more potent than heroin and 100 times stronger than morphine. A mere 2 milligrams are a lethal dose. Now dealers and drug traffickers are putting fentanyl in products that look like candy or spraying it on existing prescription drugs like Adderal[®]. There is only one reason for this - to better target kids who don't know any better.

The last representative in this legislative district voted to reduce the penalty for distributing the fentanyl equivalent of hundreds of lethal doses to just a misdemeanor ([HB 3447](#)). That isn't a common-sense solution; it actually creates more overdoses, and more problems.

Similarly, the SAFE-T Act that the Democratic legislature has passed eliminates cash bail and pushes the standard for pretrial detention higher. This makes it harder to detain drug dealers and traffickers; you'll get a revolving door back to the street to deal poison. Our DuPage County Sheriff has established incredible treatment programs for people in his jail that have helped people to get clean and off drugs. The SAFE-T Act will mandate that offenders be released within 24 to 48 hours, with no treatment or follow up required. This poorly thought-out legislation is tying the hands of law enforcement and will lead to some inhumane results.

For decades I have worked with people in recovery, and I volunteer at a helpline that deals with addiction and suicide. I have taken a leadership role with organizations that battle this crisis every day. Stigma from substance abuse and mental health issues keeps people from seeking treatment and this leads to more deaths. Illinois needs to address this crisis with leadership and determination. The legislature has totally missed the mark on this issue. As State Representative, I will make sure that law enforcement has the resources they need and that there are sufficient resources available for those who are struggling with addiction. That will keep more people safe and create true pathways to recovery.

-- Robert Stevens