

OFFICE OF THE SHERIFF



HENNEPIN COUNTY, MN

March 18, 2025

Representative Wayne Johnson
2nd Floor Centennial Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155
651-296-4244

I am writing to express my strong support for HF 2259, which would appropriate an additional \$3.5 million to Violent Crime Enforcement Teams (VCETs) statewide. This funding is absolutely critical to our ongoing efforts to combat violent crime and address the fentanyl crisis that is devastating our communities.

Since 2020, VCETs have made strategic shifts in their operations. Rather than focusing on making a large number of arrests for smaller cases, we began tying those smaller cases together into larger ones, reaching the top tiers of criminal enterprises. This more efficient and coordinated approach has led to significant increases in seizures of drugs, weapons, and other illegal goods, effectively disrupting violent criminal networks and interfering with transnational gangs who traffic guns, drugs, and humans with devastating consequences.

Nowhere is this more urgent than in our fight against fentanyl. In Hennepin County alone, around one person dies every single day from a fentanyl overdose. That's a staggering and heartbreaking statistic that continues to impact families, neighborhoods, and entire communities. Thankfully, a combination of drug education, enforcement, treatment and naloxone has begun to take an effect and lower total overdoses in Minnesota. Much of this success is owed to large seizures that disrupt drug trafficking operations and raise the street price of fentanyl to addicted consumers.

Between 2022 and 2024, VCET fentanyl pill seizures have tripled, and powder fentanyl seizures have doubled. The amount of powder fentanyl Hennepin County's VCET Drug Task Forces seized alone would be enough to kill every person in Minnesota. This crisis is escalating, not diminishing, and we must be equipped to respond.

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While VCETs have proven their worth—providing an estimated 600% return on investment through the seizure of illegal goods—the reality is that their funding has remained flat while technology costs have continued to rise. We cannot effectively combat criminal organizations and the flood of fentanyl into our communities without the resources to stay ahead.

The additional funding provided by HF 2259 would be a critical step forward in giving VCETs the support they need to continue their highly effective operations. This investment is not just about public safety; it is about saving lives. Every dollar invested in VCET yields six dollars in seizures – money that now cannot be used to buy illegal firearms, traffic human beings, or smuggle deadly drugs.

Thank you for your leadership on this bill which would help us provide our teams with the resources they need to continue this vital work.



Sheriff Dawanna Witt
Hennepin County Sheriff

Cc: Co-chair Kelly Moller

Co-chair Paul Novotny

Representative Steve Gander

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