



March 8, 2023

To: Representative Lisa Demuth
From: Sheriff Steve Soyka, Stearns County Sheriff's Office
Re: HF 615 (fentanyl being treated the same as other drugs)

Dear Representative Demuth,

I am writing to offer my FULL support of HF 615 "fentanyl held as same weight and threshold as heroin". Fentanyl could and should be classified as an epidemic or pandemic for both our nation and our state. Fentanyl overdoses are out of control. The number of OD deaths has increased each year in the city of St. Cloud with several having already occurred in 2023, including a 14-month-old and a 14-year-old!

Fentanyl may appear that it is not as dangerous as other illicit drugs due to the fact that it is widely accepted and used in the medical world; however, do not let this be confused for its tremendously addictive qualities and its widespread illegal use. It is commonly smuggled into the country from Mexican cartels and is found in every area of our state. It does not matter if you are from a metro area or a rural area it is present in both.

Recently a traffic stop in Eden Valley (population 1000) netted over 500 pills and a handgun in the car. It takes a dose of fentanyl the size of a poppyseed to kill an individual, thus, 500 pills could effectively kill all of the residents of Eden Valley. Our agency takes several overdose calls a week and responds with the use of Narcan to reverse the effects. Some occasions the drug is so strong that it takes multiple applications of Narcan to save a life.

From an enforcement standpoint, the current law is written in such a way that it is monetarily impossible to buy the amount of illegal fentanyl that would cause a dealer to go to prison. Our drug task force advised that it may cost anywhere from \$20.00 to \$80.00 per pill. To get to a first-degree charge, a case needs 500 pills. The drug task forces of Minnesota do not have the funding available to effectively charge these cases due to this weight threshold.

It is imperative that you pass this bill to make fentanyl the same weight and threshold as other drugs, including heroin which is prevalent on our streets. By passing this bill it will be easier for law enforcement to get a criminal charge that takes dealers (and potential killer of many) off the streets. Likewise, the weight and thresholds for those in possession of the drug should be reduced and made the same as other drugs. One can argue that possessors are "victims"; however, many people are possessing numerous pills and are way more than users. These "users" or possessors do not keep track of how many pills are distributed or where the pills go. This was the case in the overdose death of the 14-month-old child.

Please make the necessary changes to HF 615, pass it, and assist us in protecting the residents of Minnesota!

Steve Soyka