

*American Academy of Forensic Sciences
American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors
International Association for Identification
International Association of Forensic Nurses
National Association of Medical Examiners
Society of Forensic Toxicologists/ American Board of
Forensic Toxicology*

The Honorable Ed Markey
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Daniel M. Donovan, Jr.
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Senator Markey and Representative Donovan:

We are writing to you in support of S. 708, the International Narcotics Trafficking Response by Detecting Incoming Contraband with Technology (INTERDICT) Act.

The Consortium of Forensic Science Organizations represents over 21,000 forensic science practitioners that are currently fighting on the front lines of this opioid epidemic. This is a matter of grave importance that is growing exponentially in our laboratories and medical examiner offices. Despite some media attention and significant Congressional appropriations made to the current drug crisis, the forensic science community's key role has been overlooked and represents a critical gap in the federal response.

The forensic community includes forensic pathologists who perform the autopsies in medical examiner and coroner offices on drug overdose deaths, the forensic toxicologists who perform the toxicological analyses in such cases, the forensic drug chemists who perform the testing on seized drug samples, and others in the forensic science community (such as fingerprint examiners and DNA analysts) that perform critical examinations in supportive roles during the investigative process. In combination, these vital components play a major role in the detection, identification, and ultimate prosecution of the people responsible for this crisis.

Our state and local medicolegal death investigation systems (medical examiner and coroner offices) are currently overburdened with drug overdose cases, which, more and more, are being determined to be the result of synthetic opioids such as fentanyl and carfentanyl. Offices such as the Connecticut State medical examiner's office have lost accreditation because of the increase in the number of autopsies performed.¹ Other offices, such as the Maryland State Medical Examiner's Office, are threatened to lose their accreditation due to the increase in the number of autopsies required.² In fact, some jurisdictions have stopped performing autopsies and even conducting forensic toxicology analyses in apparent overdose cases, paradoxically because of the added burdens on their offices from the opioid crisis.³

State and local governments simply cannot cope with the rapidly rising expenses that this crisis is forcing upon them. As these entities struggle to stay on top of the investigative and analytical needs that this crisis requires, it has become difficult to stay on top of the statistics. The result of the state and local overload is the CDC's underreporting drug overdoses.⁴

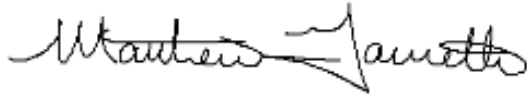
The federal government has an interest in the accuracy of the reported overdose death data. Not only is the scope of the crisis best understood by the number of overdose deaths, but it is a measure by which the federal government will gauge its success. This data comes from state and local medical examiners and coroners, who need additional resources from the federal government to work the cases and provide the data. Furthermore, these offices are an important component of surveillance for new drugs, and an important source of investigational information for law enforcement interdiction efforts.

We are pleased that S708 explicitly funds drug chemistry equipment for the U.S. Customs and Border Protection, which could prevent the amount of drugs coming into our country. It is clear that there is a great need for this equipment at international points of entry, as most drugs are manufactured outside the U.S. We do believe that that the state and local community requires some assistance and we look forward to working with you.

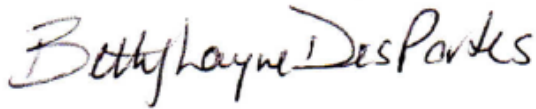
We support your legislation and urge you and other Members of Congress to work toward helping the state and local forensic science provider community as well.

References:

1. <https://www.usnews.com/news/connecticut/articles/2017-02-15/connecticut-medical-examiners-office-loses-accreditation>
2. <https://www.rt.com/usa/385083-maryland-heroin-crisis-autopsy/>
3. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/opioid-crisis-strains-medical-examiners-1493812801>
4. <http://www.cnn.com/2017/04/24/health/opioid-deaths-cdc-report/>



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