



OHIO HIGH INTENSITY DRUG TRAFFICKING AREA
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April 27, 2018

Honorable Sherrod Brown
713 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Brown:

I am writing this letter at the request of Shomari Figures your Legislative Assistant. Mr. Figures asked that I provide him with information as the Executive Director of the Ohio High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) Program regarding the threat fentanyl, fentanyl analogs, and heroin present to public safety officials across the nation. As Director, I attend numerous conferences, symposiums and meetings regarding the current heroin and fentanyl epidemic our country is experiencing.

The Ohio HIDTA currently provides funding to seventeen (17) drug task forces across Ohio. All of the task forces have seen an alarming increase of fentanyl being mixed with heroin. More recently, Ohio is seeing more overdoses and overdose deaths occurring from pure fentanyl. Ohio is even experiencing overdoses and overdose deaths where fentanyl is being mixed with cocaine.

Seizures of fentanyl by the Ohio HIDTA task forces have increased from none being seized in 2009, to 1.19 kilograms in 2015, to an astounding 83.5 kilograms in 2017. During 2017, Ohio HIDTA task forces also seized 14.5 kilograms of carfentanil, and 255 kilograms of heroin.

Fentanyl and carfentanil are 50 to 5,000 times more potent as heroin. This toxicity is a very real danger to our law enforcement officers working narcotics and coming into contact with these drugs. I am aware of at least seven instances in Ohio where police officers required medical treatment, to include the use of Narcan, after being exposed to suspected fentanyl.

Several of the Ohio HIDTA task forces have considered purchasing handheld chemical screening devices used to quickly and more safely identify suspected narcotics in the field. However, the cost of the various devices are cost prohibitive for almost all of our task forces and the other non-HIDTA task forces (approximately 40) operating in Ohio. Most of these devices can scan directly through plastic or glass for most samples to minimize contamination, reduce exposure and preserve evidence.

Testing involving fentanyl, fentanyl analogs and carfentanil are also backlogged at many labs in Ohio due to the dramatic increase in the presence of these drugs in lab submissions. According to the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigations (BCI), their labs saw an increase in positive test results involving carfentanil from 214 in 2016, to 1,199 in 2017, and year-to-date in

2018 is already at 612 positive test results. Positive fentanyl lab tests are also rapidly increasing as Ohio BCI saw a 63% increase from 2,559 in 2016 to 4,183 in 2017. Positive fentanyl tests for 2018 already stand at 2,313. As a point of comparison, there were no carfentanil positive tests in 2010 through 2015, and a total of 628 positive tests for fentanyl in the five year period, 2010 through 2014. This has created a huge burden on testing facilities such as Ohio BCI.

The ability of law enforcement officers to have handheld chemical screening devices to safely test heroin, carfentanil, fentanyl and fentanyl analogs may expedite the time it takes to bring charges against offenders. Some jurisdictions permit the use of such tests in the filing of charges, while others require actual lab analysis.

Based on my experiences here in Ohio, I fully support the Providing Officers with Electronic Resources Act. Please let me know if you need any additional information or have any questions regarding this matter.

Sincerely,

Derek Siegle, Executive Director
Ohio HIDTA