



CLACKAMAS COUNTY SHERIFF

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"Operating a fentanyl pill press is not a minor offense—it directly contributes to the proliferation of a highly dangerous and lethal substance. The act of manufacturing fentanyl pills is effectively an act of endangering lives."

Cpt. Marcus Wold, Clackamas County Sheriff's Office

RE: Testimony of Captain Marcus Wold, in Support of HB 3553

Members of the House Committee on Judiciary,

I am Captain Marcus Wold, the Investigations Division Commander for the Clackamas County Sheriff's Office. I am a long-term resident of Clackamas County and I have served as a law enforcement officer in Oregon since 1996. For over 15 years of my career, I have either worked as a narcotics investigator or supervised our narcotics team.

The Clackamas County Sheriff's Office operates the Clackamas County Interagency Task Force (CCITF), a collaborative effort comprised of personnel from the Canby Police Department, the Oregon State Police, the Oregon National Guard, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and other municipalities as staffing allows. In 2008, Clackamas County was designated as a High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) by the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, and shortly thereafter CCITF was recognized as a HIDTA Task Force. The mission of the CCITF is to disrupt and dismantle Drug Trafficking Organizations, known as DTO's, that impact Clackamas County.

Having witnessed the fentanyl epidemic firsthand, I've had a unique perspective to have watched the crisis grow in Oregon. I have personally responded to over 100 overdose deaths; each one a tragic reminder of the profound impact addiction has on families and communities. When fentanyl entered the drug markets in Oregon, no one was prepared for the severity of its effects.

Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid with a reputation for being 100 times more powerful than heroin. Our impacted communities were caught off guard by the potency of this drug, and law enforcement struggled to understand how to respond effectively. In many cases, overdose victims were found with drug paraphernalia still in their hands, highlighting the overwhelming potency of fentanyl. It was so fast-acting that users didn't have time to react before it claimed their lives.

Over time, fentanyl's presence in the drug market evolved. Initially, Drug Trafficking Organizations used it as an additive to other substances to make them stronger and more attractive to buyers. Soon it began to appear in pill form and this shift created a whole new set of challenges for both users and law enforcement. DTO's began targeting people struggling with addictions to prescription medication. In my

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experience as a narcotics investigator, the street price for prescription pills was typically around a dollar per milligram—for example, a 30-milligram pill would cost \$30, making it expensive for someone with an addiction.

As DTO's began to exploit this market, they realized that by pressing fentanyl into pills that closely resembled prescription medications like Xanax or oxycodone, they could offer an alternative at a fraction of the cost. Counterfeit prescription pills containing fentanyl, which can be sold for as little as \$5, quickly flooded the market and became an attractive option for those with a growing addiction, putting these vulnerable individuals at risk-especially those who are seeking pharmaceutical drugs from illicit sources and are not intentionally seeking fentanyl.

Because fentanyl is so potent, traffickers only need to press a tiny amount into each counterfeit pill. This ability to create pills that mimic prescription medication, but at a significantly lower cost, has led to a massive increase in the availability of counterfeit pills and dramatically increased the profit for drug traffickers.

The flood of counterfeit pills on the black market has had devastating consequences. Unlike pharmaceutical manufacturers, who must adhere to strict safety guidelines to ensure the purity and consistency of their products, black-market pill presses operate without regulation. This means that the potency of counterfeit pills can vary dramatically from one batch to the next or even from pill to pill. Instead of relying on strict guidelines for manufacturing medications, the motivation of counterfeit pill manufacturers is only based on profit for the drug trafficker.

A mere 2 milligrams of fentanyl—roughly the size of a few grains of salt—can be lethal to an average adult. As a result, even slight variations in the amount of fentanyl pressed into these counterfeit pills can lead to catastrophic outcomes. A pill that was intended to contain a non-lethal dose of fentanyl could end up containing far more than the user anticipates, resulting in accidental overdose and death.

These counterfeit pills are not only dangerous but also deceive the user into thinking they are taking a safer, regulated drug when in fact they are ingesting a potentially lethal dose of fentanyl. The manufacturers of these dangerous pills can use molds to make the pills appear similar to any other type of pill, in any color or shape. The individuals who operate pill presses are directly responsible for creating these lethal drugs. *Making the penalty a felony would recognize the seriousness of this public deception and the catastrophic consequences it can have on individuals and communities. Elevating the penalty for this crime would help law enforcement more effectively target the root causes of the fentanyl epidemic.* It would send a strong message that society takes the consequences of the opioid epidemic seriously and individuals responsible for fueling the crisis will be held accountable.

By dismantling illegal pill press operations and the people behind them, we disrupt the larger Drug Trafficking Organizations that profit from the destruction fentanyl causes.

Fentanyl is at the center of a devastating overdose crisis in our communities. Thousands of people die every year from fentanyl overdoses, and the availability of counterfeit pills in the black market significantly exacerbates this problem. *Operating a fentanyl pill press is not a minor offense—it directly contributes to the proliferation of a highly dangerous and lethal substance. The act of manufacturing fentanyl pills is effectively an act of endangering lives.* A misdemeanor does not adequately reflect the gravity of this risk to public health and safety.

End.