

United States Senate

March 13, 2023

Dear Superintendent:

Thank you for your dedication to education and the success of students in Florida. You are supporting the next generation of American leaders.

You know as well as anyone that the lessons learned in our schools go far beyond the educational curriculum taught in the classroom. Our schools mirror our society, and the consequences of issues facing our communities are reflected in our schools. The use of illegal drugs is no exception to that rule. America has a fentanyl crisis that, unfortunately, is only continuing to grow. In 2021, there were more than 100,000 fatal drug overdoses in the United States and two-thirds of those deaths were due to fentanyl.¹ Fentanyl is the leading cause of death for Americans ages 18–49.²

Unfortunately, the situation is no different in Florida. According to the Florida Department of Health, in 2020, 6,150 Floridians died from overdoses involving fentanyl and fentanyl analogues. In 2021, the death toll from these drugs in Florida was the second-highest in the nation.³

Recently, I held a roundtable on the fentanyl crisis with families, law enforcement, and subject-matter experts. A major takeaway from this event was that our students must better understand just how dangerous fentanyl is. One pill can kill; and often, those who lose their lives have no idea that the pill they've taken is laced with fentanyl until it's too late. Raising awareness about this deadly crisis requires a new approach that students cannot simply tune out or ignore. After speaking with many families who have lost a child or loved one to fentanyl, I write today to urge you to engage with parents of victims and allow them to be the powerful messengers they are as we work to save lives.

¹ <https://www.npr.org/2022/12/18/1144002996/tracing-americas-plunge-into-an-opioid-crisis>

² <https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/interactive/2022/dea-fentanyl-failure/>

³ <https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2022-us-fentanyl-opioid-deaths/?!leadSource=uverify%20wall>

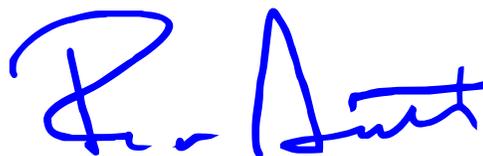
Parents of victims are eager to help prevent future tragedies like the ones they have experienced, but they have told me they often receive pushback when speaking with school districts about providing educational seminars to students on the dangers of fentanyl. When drug overdoses are the third-leading cause of death amongst children and adolescents, it shocks me that any school district could be against working with these volunteer organizations to promote educational programs that will save kids' lives.⁴

In 2021, 1,145 children aged 14–18 died due to a fentanyl overdose. That is roughly the size of school class room every week.⁵ Think about that: fentanyl is killing an entire classroom of high school-aged Americans every single week.

Experts and law enforcement agree that the best way forward to prevent our kids from trying these substances is to talk to them directly.⁶ As leaders in education, I ask that you work with advocacy organizations who are ready and willing to come in to your schools and warn of the dangers of fentanyl, if you are not already doing so. These volunteers are families and loved ones of victims of this crisis, and their perspective could change the course of a child's life.

Together, we can help save lives and prevent the crisis from claiming more unnecessary victims. Too many families in Florida and across the country have felt the pain of losing a child. I am here to help, and willing to do what it takes to stop this growing fentanyl crisis. Please let me know what you need to be successful. My staff and I stand ready to connect you with resources and organizations to help get started.

Sincerely,



Rick Scott
United States Senator

⁴ <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/nejmc2201761>

⁵ <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2790949#jld220013f1>

⁶ <https://www.cnn.com/2022/12/27/opinions/american-teens-fentanyl-drug-overdoses-parents-hadland/index.html>