

**Statement before the United States Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and
Transportation**

Interdicting Illicit Drug Trafficking: A View from the Front Lines

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Chairman Cruz, Ranking Member Cantwell, and Members of the Committee thank you for inviting me to participate in today's hearing and for your attention to a topic that has impacted countless families across the country and in the communities I serve. The fentanyl crisis is one of national importance and national urgency.

My name is Kevin Hall, and I am honored to serve as Police Chief for the City of Spokane, the second largest City in the State of Washington. I was appointed to the position in August of 2024 after previously serving more than 32 years in the Tucson Police Department in patrol, investigations, SWAT, and nearly 8 years as Assistant Chief. I also serve as Co-chair of the Research Advisory Committee for the International Chiefs of Police; I'm a graduate of the Major Cities Chief's Association Police Executive Leadership Institute, the Police Executive Research Forum's Senior Management Institute for Police, the Harvard Kennedy School of Government Senior Executives in State & Local Government and I am proud to be an inductee in the Evidence-Based Policing Hall of Fame.

Since 2019, the annual number of opioid drug overdoses has doubled in Washington State, and Spokane's opioid deaths have surpassed the state's average.¹ Recent reports by the CDC and DEA illustrating national declines in fatal drug overdoses are not the reality in Washington state. The Spokane Fire Department's calls for overdoses have increased 30% in 2024 over the previous year.² Like every other police agency in the country, the Spokane Police Department continues to allocate more and more resources to address open-air drug use, fatal drug overdoses, and the overall harm caused to the community by fentanyl. A recent Spokane County Medical Examiner Report concluded that at least 346 individuals died of an opioid-related overdose last year, with fentanyl accounting for over 75% of those deaths.³ The cost of fentanyl is devastating both individually and collectively. The Senate's Joint Economic Committee previously estimated that in 2020 alone, the opioid epidemic cost the country roughly 1.5 *trillion* dollars.⁴

The scale of fentanyl's impact is in part due to the potency of the drug – 40 to 50 times more lethal and addictive than heroin – as well as its accessibility and street price.⁵ From my 32 years

¹ See [Opioid and Drug Overdose Data | Washington State Department of Health](#).

² ['Anecdotally, we're seeing more dead people.' – RANGE Media](#).

³ [Most overdose deaths in Spokane County among housed, employed adults, according to new report | News | kxly.com](#).

⁴ [JEC Analysis Finds Opioid Epidemic Cost U.S. Nearly \\$1.5 Trillion in 2020 - JEC Analysis Finds Opioid Epidemic Cost U.S. Nearly \\$1.5 Trillion in 2020 - United States Joint Economic Committee \(senate.gov\)](#).

⁵ See [Fentanyl Facts | Stop Overdose | CDC](#).

of policing in southern Arizona, in a city 60 miles north of the international border with Mexico, I know that the vast majority of fentanyl enters this country through legal ports of entry, often concealed in commercial cargo trucks, RVs, trailers, and cars. Let me be clear: this traffic represents a mere fraction of the vehicles coming into the United States from Mexico for legal purposes every day.

Nevertheless, the Tucson Police Department, in partnership with their federal partners, frequently seizes hundreds of pounds of fentanyl. In November of 2024, Tucson PD, in conjunction with the Southern Arizona HIDTA (High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area) group, seized 1.1 million illicit fentanyl pills that were hidden in a Dodge Charger.⁶ This car crossed the international border and traveled north on I-19 and then I-10, where it was intercepted in Tucson. In a similar example, in October of 2024, a stop on a vehicle that took the same route resulted in a seizure of 600,000 fentanyl pills. 1.7 million pills in two non-descript sedans traveling on America's highways, nearly unimpeded.

The fentanyl not seized by law enforcement at or near the border travels along transportation networks using passenger buses and rail, but most commonly cars and trucks on major interstates throughout the country, routes commonly policed by state, county, and local law enforcement.

For instance, we know from collaborative investigations with state and federal partners that fentanyl in Spokane enters the US from Mexico, travels up along interstates I-10 and I-5, and makes its way to Eastern Washington via the Tri-Cities. The major transportation artery into eastern Washington and northern Idaho is I-90, which represents the most significant pathway for fentanyl into Spokane and northern Idaho.

Spokane area law enforcement have recently seized pounds of powder fentanyl, a new phenomenon where pills are being replaced by bulk powder fentanyl. A harrowing example of fentanyl trafficking in Spokane involved an investigation where traffickers, utilizing I-90, transported bulk fentanyl pill loads to Spokane from the Tri-Cities area. Spokane PD, after an intensive investigation, interdicted the trafficker, resulting in a violent, mid-day shootout with Spokane Police officers that endangered innocents, including small children in the area.⁷ Two thousand fentanyl pills were seized from the car the suspect was traveling in. The spin-off investigation from this shooting resulted in a seizure of over 60 pounds of methamphetamine and over 500,000 fentanyl pills.

In 2024, the Burien Police Department and King County Sheriff's Office on the west side of Washington state seized more than 1 million dollars in fentanyl, meth, and heroin that were smuggled in a commercial truck.⁸ According to charging documents, the drug traffickers transported hundreds of pounds of drugs in a semi-truck on regular trips from southern California to Washington State.

We also know that drugs are smuggled in through commercial airlines, requiring sophisticated collaboration between local, state, and federal law enforcement partners to track and intercept them successfully. One such example occurred in January 2023, when federal, state, and local

⁶ [Tucson Police help recover over 1.1 million fentanyl pills in traffic stop](#)

⁷ [Spokane drug agents seize press capable of making 17,000 fentanyl pills an hour.](#)

⁸ [Drugs worth \\$2.49 million, \\$46K in cash and gun recovered in Burien bust.](#)

law enforcement conducted a bust at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport SEATAC airport and found more than 400,000 fentanyl pills in checked luggage of drug couriers.⁹ The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) estimated that drug traffickers were bringing millions of pills a month into the Seattle region via drug couriers' checked luggage. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (SEA), the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Port of Seattle police, and other local law enforcement agencies worked together to interdict these drugs.

I appreciate this Committee's support for the partnerships that are critical to the work we do on the ground. Without the cooperation of federal, tribal, state, and local agencies, and private sector partners, the problem would be even worse. But I also know that we can work together to strengthen these key partnerships and produce better outcomes for the people we all serve.

To that end, I urge Congress to pass the Stop Smuggling Illicit Synthetic Drugs on US Transportation Networks Act. This legislation would leverage precious federal resources to develop and provide non-intrusive technologies and canines to conduct inspections of cargo transported via civil aircraft, passenger and freight rail, commercial motor vehicles, and maritime vessels. By improving the detection and interception of fentanyl at the border and along routes of interstate commerce, this legislation will help choke supply and mitigate the devastating downstream consumption of fentanyl. This is exactly the kind of initiative that we need to strengthen the partnership between local, state, federal, and tribal law enforcement in the fight against fentanyl and the smuggling of illicit drugs into our communities.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

⁹ See [VIDEO: KIRO 7 Investigates packing drugs in checked luggage – KIRO 7 News Seattle](#).