

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 15, 2024

The Honorable Chris Murphy  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Homeland Security  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
131 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Katie Britt  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Homeland Security  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
131 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Murphy and Ranking Member Britt,

As the Subcommittee begins deliberations on Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 Homeland Security appropriations legislation, we ask your support for increasing the screening capabilities of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to detect deadly illicit fentanyl crossing our borders. We know that you share our dedication to combatting the opioid epidemic that is harming communities across the United States, and appreciate your consideration of this request.

Fentanyl is a particularly deadly synthetic opioid, up to 50 times stronger than heroin and 100 times stronger than morphine. It is so powerful that even a few salt-sized grains can be deadly. In 2022, there were 107,941 drug-overdose deaths in the United States, with overdoses from synthetic opioids such as fentanyl increasing since 2021.<sup>1</sup>

Not only the adult population is at risk. A report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in 2022 found that the median monthly overdose deaths related to fentanyl for people ages 10 to 19 increased by 182 percent from July to December 2019 compared with the same period in 2021. Between July 2019 and December 2021, more than 2,200 teens fatally overdosed in the United States, according to the report — and fentanyl was involved in 84 percent of those deaths.<sup>2</sup>

Although pharmaceutical fentanyl can be misused, most fentanyl deaths are linked to illicitly manufactured fentanyl. According to the Drug Enforcement Administration, Mexican transnational criminal organizations now supply most of the illicit fentanyl trafficked into the United States. Fentanyl produced illicitly in Mexico is principally smuggled into the United States across the southwest border by U.S. citizens.<sup>3</sup> China is the main supplier of the “precursor” chemicals used in the production of illicit fentanyl in Mexico.

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – National Center for Health Statistics, *Drug Overdose Deaths in the United States 2002-2022* (Mar. 2024), <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db491.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Timothy Bella, *Girl dies from fentanyl-laced painkiller, latest in wave of Texas teen deaths*, Washington Post (Mar. 16, 2023), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2023/03/16/texas-fentanyl-overdose-teens-sienna-vaughn/>; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, Drug Overdose Deaths Among Persons Aged 10–19 Years — United States, July 2019–December 2021* (Dec. 16, 2022), <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/71/wr/mm7150a2.htm#:~:text=Median%20monthly%20overdose%20deaths%20among,opioids%20and%2084%25%20involved%20IMFs.>

CBP has had success interdicting fentanyl and other synthetic opioids with high-tech chemical screening devices and the support of scientists in CBP laboratories. Previous funding has allowed CBP to establish the 24/7 Narcotics Reachback Center to provide near real-time scientific and technical support to frontline officers and agents, and the INTERDICT Center, a laboratory that has bolstered CBP's ability to classify and analyze emerging chemical threats.

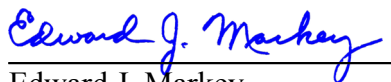
CBP has also been able to deploy powerful drive-through non-intrusive inspection (NII) scanners at certain land ports-of-entry. These devices have allowed the agency to scan nearly six times as much cargo per day as it could previously. The use of NII systems is critical in detecting evolving tactics used by the transnational criminal organizations that attempt to traffic narcotics such as fentanyl across the border. But CBP needs increased and consistent funding to expand scanning capabilities to continue to detect and stop more of these deadly drugs from coming into the United States.


We appreciate the investment made in FY2024 for the purpose of detecting and interdicting synthetic opioids, and ask that you continue to prioritize this critically important task. By providing CBP with additional fentanyl-detection and analysis resources and technology, we can increase its ability to intercept fentanyl and other synthetic opioids at the border, rapidly interpret screening test results from the field, and perform more robust testing. Combined, these resources will help safeguard field personnel from exposure to these deadly drugs, prevent fentanyl from entering the country, and ultimately save lives.

We must provide CBP with the funding it needs to stop illicit fentanyl from getting into the country. Therefore, we respectfully ask that the Subcommittee support increased funding for opioid detection and analysis equipment in FY2025, including by funding President Biden's request of \$849 million for NII, which the Subcommittee supported last year.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

  
Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator

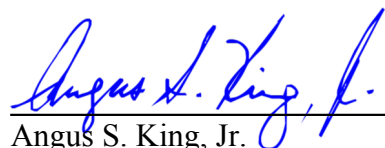
  
Catherine Cortez Masto  
United States Senator

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<sup>3</sup> *Fentanyl Is Smuggled for U.S. Citizens by U.S. Citizens, Not Asylum Seekers*, CATO Institute (Sept. 12, 2022), <https://www.cato.org/blog/fentanyl-smuggled-us-citizens-us-citizens-not-asylum-seekers>.



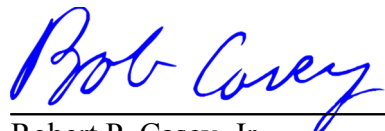
Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.  
United States Senator



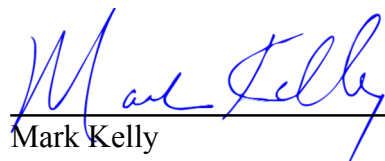
Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
United States Senator



Tina Smith  
United States Senator



Mark Kelly  
United States Senator



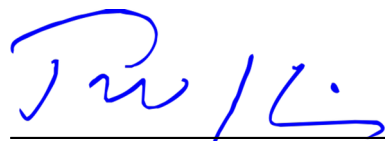
Jack Reed  
United States Senator



Peter Welch  
United States Senator



Martin Heinrich  
United States Senator

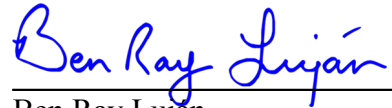


Tim Kaine  
United States Senator



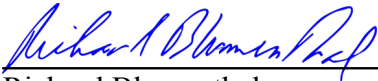
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Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator



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Ben Ray Lujan  
United States Senator



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Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator



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John Hickenlooper  
United States Senator



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Alex Padilla  
United States Senator



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Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator



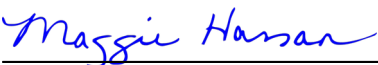
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Jacky Rosen  
United States Senator



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Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator



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Margaret Wood Hassan  
United States Senator



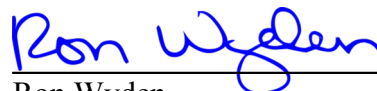
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Thomas R. Carper  
United States Senator



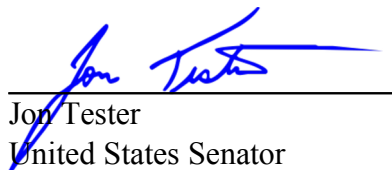
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Christopher A. Coons  
United States Senator



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Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



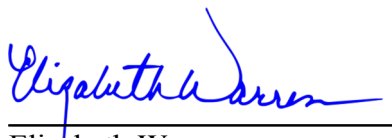
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Jon Tester  
United States Senator



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Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator



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Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator



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Gary C. Peters  
United States Senator