



## COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Hearing Statement of Intelligence and Counterterrorism Chairman Max Rose (D-NY)

#### *Homeland Security Implications of the Opioid Crisis*

July 25, 2019

Today, the Subcommittee on Intelligence and Counterterrorism, and the Subcommittee on Border Security, Facilitation, and Operations are meeting to examine the homeland security implications of America's unprecedented opioid epidemic. We look forward to the witnesses discussing the flow of illicit fentanyl into the United States, including China and Mexico's role; the role of the Department of Homeland Security and its partners in combatting that flow, and how to best mitigate this threat. I believe we can all agree that we have an opioid crisis in our country. Nothing about this is partisan and I know we can come together, Democrats and Republicans, to fight fentanyl and end this epidemic. While news that drug overdose deaths are on the decline is welcoming, the overall rate of overdose deaths linked to fentanyl continues to rise.

My district has been one of the epicenters of the epidemic. I've spoken to too many mothers and fathers who have had to bury their child. So, are we seeing progress? Yes, but nowhere near enough. For perspective, New York City, the Center for Disease Control indicates that in a 12-year span, from 2000 to 2012, fentanyl was identified in 2% of all drug overdose deaths. Sadly, by 2016, that number rose to 44%. And by 2017, 57% of all deaths that resulted from drug overdose had fentanyl involved. Nearly 1,500 lives gone. From 2% of overdose deaths to over half of all overdose deaths in just five years – that is shocking. Much of the fentanyl seized in New York City is produced by Mexican cartels, which acquire chemical precursors from China, the world's largest producer of illicit fentanyl. New York City is not an outlier here. Fentanyl and its analogues are devastating communities throughout this country.

Just last year, 48,000 overdose deaths involved an opioid, and nearly 32,000 of which involved fentanyl or a similar drug. Most of that illicit fentanyl from China arrives via cargo ship and international mail. Illicit fentanyl seized from international mail facilities in the United States coming from China is over 90 percent pure. For perspective on the lethality of illicit fentanyl, it is 80 to 100 times stronger than morphine and 30 to 50 times more potent than heroin. All it takes is two milligrams to kill most people. That's about the equivalent of a single grain of rice. And once exposed, it could kill in minutes. And that is just fentanyl, there are other forms of the drug that are far more deadly. Congress has been working hard to address this crisis. Earlier this year I introduced legislation, The Fentanyl Sanctions Act, that will impose sanctions on manufacturers who provide fentanyl to traffickers. And it gives more tools and resources to law enforcement go after illicit fentanyl traffickers in China, Mexico, and other countries. This bill passed with bipartisan support in the House of Representatives and the Senate. And I look forward to the President signing it into law soon.

The days when a country could pump our streets full of illicit drugs and chemicals and face no consequences are over. I'm also proud to be co-leading the Joint Task Force to Combat Opioid Trafficking Act with my good friend Congressman Jim Langevin. This bipartisan bill will establish a Joint Task Force at the Department of Homeland Security to stop the inflow of fentanyl and other illicit opioids into the United States. This critical bill also encourages the Department of Homeland Security to be innovative and think outside the box to fight drug trafficking – including by looking at new ways to take advantage of public-private partnerships when carrying out this mission. Officials at the local, state, and federal levels have also been working hard to address this crisis, and I applaud them for their efforts.

In March of this year, the Drug Enforcement Administration and local law enforcement disrupted a fentanyl mill in Westchester, New York, seizing 5 kilograms of fentanyl, or enough to kill nearly 2 million people. However, I am concerned about a recent DHS Office of Inspector General report from last September which indicates DHS's Custom and Border Protection's mail inspection process needs improvement at JFK International Airport in New York City. With much of the illicit fentanyl arriving via international mail from China, this is concerning. Already, dealers on the dark web take advantage of the existing security gaps highlighted in the OIG report. They guarantee delivery of their illicit fentanyl and even offer replacing orders that do not arrive. Equally concerning is last week's Management Alert indicating CBP did not adequately protect employees from possible fentanyl exposure. Accidental inhalation or physical contact of fentanyl is deadly. We need to protect those tasked to protect America and ensure CBP has the adequate equipment, training, and policies to ensure a safe work environment.

# # #

Media contact: Adam Comis at (202) 225-9978