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06/14/2024

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## Fentanyl in California: Orange County's Frontline Battle

An invasion has taken place in America. This insurgent has effortlessly instilled itself within local communities consequently destroying those communities and killing many of its members; the culprit is Fentanyl. Fentanyl is considered by many as the greatest threat to modern Americans today. Fentanyl has soared in popularity and can be found throughout the country. With its gaining in commonality, fentanyl-related issues have been increasing rapidly.

Fentanyl was created in 1959 and distributed in the 60s as an intravenous anesthetic (pain relief). Its potency is 100 times greater than morphine and 50 times more potent than heroin. Readily available to the public for medical use it was soon twisted into a recreational drug. However, the potency of fentanyl made it very dangerous to take without proper prescription and professional supervision. The lethal amount of fentanyl is a mere 2 milligrams, which is the equivalent of 10 to 15 grains of table salt. This has sadly led to a 2,294% increase in fentanyl-related deaths in California over the past 6 years.

10 years ago, the total of drug-related deaths in the United States stood at 50,000. Now the death total stands at over 100,000, and fentanyl makes up for 70% of those deaths. It is the first time in American history that the number of drug-related deaths has exceeded 100,000. California alone from 2016 to 2021 has seen a 2,294% increase in fentanyl-related deaths. The number in 2016 was 239 deaths and in 2021 that number rose drastically to 5,722 deaths.

Orange County in those same years has seen a 1,800% increase in fentanyl-related deaths. The availability of this drug can be attested by the amount of fentanyl that has been obtained by law enforcement. In 2022 alone 499.9 pounds of fentanyl and 405,283 pills suspected of containing fentanyl were seized by law officials. In the prior year, that amount was 132.9 pounds; considerably smaller yet capable of producing 50 million lethal doses. In the increasing interaction law officials have had with

fentanyl deputies since 2015, they are now suited with naloxone. Naloxone is a fast-acting opioid overdose reversal medicine that quickly blocks the effects of the opioid and returns proper breathing to the person. Deputies have successfully used naloxone on 382 individuals.

Efforts have been taken to address this crisis. Firstly, the OCSD furthering the deputy training in dealing with fentanyl encounters. Along with that many schools have begun to implement “Above the Influence” a curriculum that educates 5th and 6th grade students on the serious and life-threatening effects drugs invoke. However, additional action is needed to lower the significant occurrence of fentanyl. The majority of all fentanyl entering the U.S. come from the southern border through Mexico. Securing the border will allow officials to intercept fentanyl preventing it from infiltrating into the country. In conjunction with that proper funding is required for this to be successful. Over the past five years, the Regional Narcotics Suppression Program (RNSP) has seen a 20% decrease in assigned personnel. During this time OCSD has elected to keep 25 personnel assigned to RNSP. The first step has been taken and with that, the continuation of this journey into protecting the community from such detrimental substances demands laws to be passed. Communities need to unite and act if they desire the eradication of fentanyl before it is too late.