



August 5, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President
United States of America
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden:

We, the undersigned, are parents who have lost a child to fentanyl poisoning, or have substantial national security, law enforcement, or defense expertise.

We urge you and your administration to adopt a comprehensive and integrated approach to address the danger that illicit fentanyl and its many chemical analogues (collectively “fentanyls”) pose to the American people. During your presidential campaign, you reminded Americans that we have to work together as a nation to save lives. One way you pledged to do so was to pursue public health programs and efforts to “stem the flow of illicit drugs, like fentanyl... into the United States.”

We fully support this sound approach and urge you to bring the federal government’s full, coordinated force to bear in mitigating this continuing and growing threat. We strongly recommend that you declare fentanyls—in sufficient quantities and specific configurations—to be Weapons of Mass Destruction.

Fentanyls are terrifyingly lethal. A quantity of fentanyl equal in mass to a single packet of sweetener (1 gram) can kill 500 people. A similar amount of carfentanil can kill 50,000. Fentanyls can enter the body through ingestion, inhalation, and absorption through the skin and kill quickly, often before an antidote can be administered.

Domestically, fentanyls are treated as illegal narcotics. At the same time, the Department of Defense and other agencies sharing responsibility for national security consider fentanyls to be dangerous chemical weapons with the potential to cause massive casualties. Both views are accurate. Approaching domestic fentanyl policy solely as a narcotics issue, however, is placing millions of Americans at risk.

The United States, for the first time, has a booming black market for illegal narcotics that are also devastating chemical weapons. Over the last two decades, increasingly larger amounts of fentanyls—manufactured primarily in China and Mexico—have been smuggled across our borders. According to a National Defense University publication, in 2018, “...Chinese pharmaceutical producers are illicitly shipping sufficient amounts of Carfentanil to potentially deliver tens of millions of lethal doses across the globe.” (*NDU Prism, “WMD Terrorism—The Once and Future Use,” Volume 7 Number 3 at page 27.*)

The Department of Homeland Security seizes only a fraction of the fentanyls that traffickers attempt to bring into the U.S. Sadly, it is estimated that more than 40,000 Americans died last year from these dangerous chemicals.

Therefore, U.S. policy toward illicit fentanyls cannot be based solely on the intent of drug traffickers. The entire federal government must acknowledge the risk that DOD has already recognized—fentanyls pose a substantial threat as Weapons of Mass Destruction used by foreign or domestic terrorists. The significant presence of illicitly

manufactured fentanyl in our cities and neighborhoods places all of us in danger. These chemicals have the capacity for wide-scale devastation when distributed through our air, water systems, or other methods.

Any strategic U.S. policy toward fentanyl must acknowledge that these chemicals are potential Weapons of Mass Destruction. We respectfully ask, Mr. President, that you declare them as such by Executive Order.

Such an Order will unify the federal government's approach to fentanyl and allow for better coordination across the executive branch and with state and local authorities. It will allow U.S. national intelligence to play a greater role in assisting law enforcement and empower the Department of Defense to share expertise and technology to improve detection and interdiction efforts. It will allow the federal government to become more engaged in tracking and disrupting the finances of fentanyl traffickers. It will provide a mandate to ensure the U.S. is prepared to respond to a mass-casualty event involving fentanyl, regardless of what might cause it. And it will act as a deterrent to those who might otherwise consider trafficking in fentanyl, irrespective of their intent.

A WMD declaration for fentanyl could be crafted to preclude any unintended interference with legitimate uses of these chemicals. Legally manufactured, appropriately regulated, and carefully distributed fentanyl have significant medical and veterinary uses and present no extraordinary threat. Your declaration will only target large-scale trafficking and will not lead to increased harm to individuals with substance abuse issues. As the availability of fentanyl decreases across the U.S., significant health benefits will accrue. An Executive Order declaring fentanyl as WMDs will “right-size” the United States’ approach to this growing threat and protect American lives.

President Biden, we urge you to act on this declaration today, and we offer our expertise in the crafting of this designation and adjacent policies.

Sincerely,

James and Valorie Rauh

Parents of Thomas H. Rauh
Founders, Families Against Fentanyl

The Honorable Andrew C. Weber

Senior Fellow, Council on Strategic Risks
Former Assistant Secretary of Defense for Nuclear, Chemical, and Biological Defense Programs

The Honorable James W. Carroll

Former Director, Office of National Drug Control Policy

The Honorable Uttam Dhillon

Former Acting Administrator, Drug Enforcement Administration
Former Director, Office of Counternarcotics Enforcement
U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security

The Honorable Tom Ridge

Former 1st U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security
Former 43rd Governor of Pennsylvania

Michael J. Morrell

Former Acting Director and Deputy Director of the Central Intelligence Agency

Admiral James A. “Sandy” Winnefeld, Jr.

USN (retired), Former Vice Chairman,
Joint Chiefs of Staff

The Honorable John O. Brennan

Former Director of the Central Intelligence Agency
Former Deputy National Security Advisor for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism

Ambassador Earl Anthony “Tony” Wayne

Former US Ambassador to Mexico and Argentina, Deputy Ambassador to Afghanistan
Former Assistant Secretary of State for Economic and Business Affairs

Jeremy Bash

Former Chief of Staff
Department of Defense
Central Intelligence Agency

The Honorable Mary Bono

Former Member, U.S. House of Representatives

Roneet Lev, M.D. FACEP

Emergency / Addiction Physician
Former Chief Medical Officer, ONDCP

ADDITIONAL SIGNATORIES TO BE ADDED