

Dear Congress Members,

My name is Shelley Chandler, I lost my son Cody February 19th, 2024. Cody struggled with substance abuse disorder for over a decade. Cody was so much more than a recovering drug addict, he was a child of God, a family oriented man, extremely kind, and generous beyond measure. No matter his circumstances he always tried to light up every room he walked into. They say the hardest loss is that of a child. I wouldn't wish this daily heartbreak on my worst enemy. The loss of Cody has impacted my family in immense ways. Far too many families are having their loved ones stolen from them and many lives are being thrown away. The fentanyl epidemic is a pressing issue that should be more of a concern. The lack of resources and support is causing mass casualties in our communities and yours.

The devastation caused by illicit fentanyl and other fatal narcotics is unimaginable. More specifically the effects of fentanyl go beyond the drug user themselves, it tears families apart while traumatizing paramedics and first responders who are called to help.

I watched Cody go through many different drug withdrawals trying to get and stay clean, but fentanyl is a whole other war. It takes over the mind and the body and they become a shell of who they were created to be.

Fentanyl is easily accessible and inexpensive which makes it all the more dangerous. Narcotics nowadays have evolved, the dependency and withdrawals have become a lot more severe. A fentanyl overdose doesn't commonly happen when the drug user is using it daily, most happen during a relapse and sadly a lot of times there is no second chance. The accessibility of fentanyl has a huge impact on the size of this crisis, for less than a dollar anyone can make a choice that can change the trajectory of their life and their loved ones.

You can't be a functional fentanyl addict, therefore most end up on the streets homeless.

Choosing to let Cody stay with me during his recovery was especially difficult being a self employed home childcare provider. It was draining to watch my son turn into a skeleton and suffer through withdrawal numerous times. I suffer from PTSD due to caring for my son during this time and finding him in his room, unconscious and not breathing. That day and those memories are what I fought so hard for not to happen. Part of me died that day with him.

Fentanyl and other narcotics change your brain chemistry and can take up to 18 months for it to return back to normal and too many addicts don't make it that long.

The lasting impact drug abuse has on a family is insurmountable and a big change needs to be made. Changing the schedule of fentanyl could save many lives and I believe that we have more work to do than just that. Our community needs support and more education on addiction and the effects it has. Cody was fortunate enough to save four lives through organ donation.

Since the loss of my son Cody, advocating for change when it comes to addiction has become a passion of mine and I hope to save those who, like Cody, wanted to be free from the slavery that fentanyl and addiction overall is. Thank you for your time.

Shelley Chandler.