

Testimony of Bridgette Norring
United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary Hearing on
The Poisoning of America: Fentanyl, its Analogues, and the Need for
Permanent Class Scheduling

WRITTEN TESTIMONY

Thank you, Chairman Grassley, Ranking Member Durbin, and members of the committee. My name is Bridgette Norring. Today, it is a great honor and privilege to be seated before you. I am a wife, mother, grandmother, advocate, and founder of the Devin J. Norring Foundation, a foundation I wish didn't need to be in existence.

Today marks another month that my son, Devin Joseph Norring, was taken from this earthly world—well before he ever had a chance to really start his life. You see, Senators, parents like myself no longer measure our time by upcoming holidays or the changing seasons. We measure our time by how many weeks, months, or years since our children lost their lives.

April 4th will mark five years since Devin's life was cut short by fentanyl poisoning. That day, my family was turned upside down by a crisis we had no clue existed until it was far too late to prevent Devin's passing.

Devin was your average teenager. He had a passion for football, skateboarding, bmx'ing, and music. He was smart as a whip when it came to anything mathematical. He was his siblings'—Hayley and Caden's—greatest protector. Devin had plans to go to California over the summer to check out the schools there, schools that would help him fine-tune his love for music.

Unfortunately, he never made it. Devin died at the height of the pandemic.

My son had been suffering from blackout migraines and dental pain. He had been under a doctor's care, an MRI had been ordered to investigate his migraines, and he was put on a treatment plan for his cracked molar. When those critical appointments were canceled, we believe that Devin was desperate to relieve his pain.

One evening, unbeknownst to my husband and I, Devin and a young man he was with signed into Snapchat and were connected to a drug dealer selling to local teens via the platform. When things took a turn for the worse, the other young man who knew Devin was in need of medical attention chose to leave without saying a word or calling for help.

My youngest son, Caden, who was only 14 at the time, found his older brother unresponsive after picking the lock on Devin's bedroom door to try and wake him the following morning. His bedroom should have been the safest place in the world. As I held him one last time before the medical examiner took him, I made a promise to Devin that I would do something so that his death would not be in vain.

In the weeks that followed, we learned that Devin was poisoned by fentanyl. That one pill he took had enough fentanyl in it to kill multiple people. I now also know that social media platforms are one of the primary sources for children, teens, and young adults to purchase all types of drugs, and while most of them are not sold as fentanyl, the majority of them contain fentanyl. Teens and young adults continue to lose their lives to these deadly counterfeit pills simply because they don't know the pills may be lethal.

Senators, this crisis has so many facets to it, and we need to address each and every one with care, empathy, and courage. From educating our youngest children and families to addressing supply and demand issues to a lack of access to affordable mental health and recovery programs to providing treatment programs to those suffering from substance use disorders in our jails to holding dealers and traffickers accountable for the devastating loss of life—we must work towards all of these goals. However, critical to solving this crisis is addressing the fact that social media platforms are not just facilitating the peddling of drugs to our children; the platforms make these connections as a matter of design, and they are profiting from them. We cannot say we are protecting our children until we face this fact and pass legislation to stop it.

In the Spring of 2021, I joined Mr. Puerta, Amy Neville, and several other families who had been invited by Ed Terner to meet privately with executives from Snapchat. Senators—that meeting is, to this day, what fuels my drive to continue this fight for social media reform.

During that meeting, Snapchat's executives tried to claim they had no idea this was happening on their platform until the Ternans brought it to their attention. Lies. Drug sales have been a growing problem on Snapchat and other social media platforms for years. This fact was widely reported in the media and known to these companies.

In my opinion, Snapchat is the largest open-air drug market there is. On Snapchat, cartels lie in wait to sell their poison through any means necessary because they know that the platform will help them find new customers. Snapchat recommends children become friends with drug dealers, rewards kids for connecting, and makes sure that there is very little risk of getting caught and charged with a crime.

After denying that they knew drugs were being sold on their platform, Snapchat's executives then told us that, as parents, we should have been monitoring our children better, and due to Section 230, we had no power to hold them accountable in court. They looked at parents whose children had died, heard our stories, and then lied about what they knew. Instead of trying to help make sure this never happens to another family, their focus was making sure we knew there was nothing we could do because they were immune from any legal action. They told us that they are untouchable.

Senators, if someone opened a brick-and-mortar store and then encouraged and facilitated the peddling of drugs to kids in that store, they would be held accountable. Why do the same rules of right and wrong not apply to these Big Tech companies?

Senators, how do we as parents monitor our children on social media products when those products have been designed to lure kids and teens in with the temptation of disappearing messages and other addictive features? Especially when virtually every teenager, or teenager's sibling or friend, has a smartphone. And even if we took all the phones away, every school gives kids access to screens and social media for educational purposes. Parents do not stand a chance at being able to protect our kids on our own.

Snapchat's executives made it seem as if we should've known about their in-app reporting feature, as if a reporting feature somehow made the rest of what they are doing okay. And yet, I cannot count how many times my family and I, and the teens in my small town, reported the dealers that killed my son using Snapchat's in-app feature. In some instances, the accounts were shut down. In many others, we were ignored or told that the offense did not go against their standards.

My husband and I are no different than every American parent doing the best we can to protect our kids from the constant threat that social media poses. We did our due diligence in spot-checking our children's accounts when they were minors. We preached constantly about internet safety and etiquette. None of that stopped Snapchat from allowing my children to open multiple new accounts to avoid our scrutiny. It did not stop them from pushing products designed to addict and exploit America's young people. It did not stop them from blaming parents when our kids died. And it is no different than when opioid companies created a product they knew was extremely harmful and addictive, told the public that it was safe, and then blamed the parents when kids died as a result.

The same things happen on Facebook and Instagram. These companies ignore egregious violations of law, harm children, and shirk all responsibility even while staring right at the proof. At this point, in my opinion, these companies have no qualms when it comes to disregarding the promises made to Americans about what they are doing and will do to keep our kids safe. They ignore their own rules to the point where they probably no longer know what the rules are. They prioritize their profits over our children's safety.

For years, Senators, my family and Devin's friends watched these dealers operate on Snapchat, Instagram, and Telegram. We watched for years as these dealers use Snapchat's filters to indicate which city they were in, a calling card advertising their deadly pills. For years, we provided the Hastings Police Department and the Dakota County Drug Task Force with pictures of these dealers taken from multiple devices because, as you may know, taking a screenshot on Snapchat will notify the sender. That is another feature specific to Snapchat that, in my opinion, serves no purpose other than making it hard for our children to protect themselves.

While we got zero justice for Devin's death, I am proud to say that we have aided in the indictment of more than a dozen individuals with ties to the Sinaloa Cartel and the Minneapolis street gangs who were traveling to the Arizona/Mexico border and bringing these pills back to our community and neighboring communities. And again, to be clear, they were doing this and are able to do this again because of a product being made, sold, and distributed right here in the U.S. I am grateful to US Attorney Andrew Luger's office for their work on this case; one of many in my state.

In speaking with students from 7th-12th grade, sharing Devin's story, explaining what fentanyl is, and teaching them everything we wish someone would have taught our children, we make it a point to discuss Snapchat and the role that social media plays in this crisis. It breaks my heart to say that every single hand goes up when we ask if they know someone lost to fentanyl poisoning. When discussing Snapchat, they tell me about the toll it takes on their mental health; the anxiety to keep their Snap streak going, constantly checking their phones, loss of sleep, and bullying. On average, they are spending close to 26+ hours a week on social media. When asked if they could go without social media, primarily Snapchat, the answer is always no. That is where all of their friends can be found, and the social stigma of not being on it creates a level of anxiety and depression most teens cannot withstand.

I have come to DC multiple times now to meet with many of you and your staff. My family fights hard alongside other families hurt by social media to support the Kids Online Safety Act. I thank Senators Blumenthal and Blackburn for spearheading this vital legislation on behalf of our children. KOSA is the crucial foundation on which all social media reform must stand.

Last July, on my birthday, I heard the amazing news that the Senate passed KOSA by a vote of 91-3. That vote speaks volumes. It tells me that you can come together and do what is right with the power you each hold to protect our children. It was the first birthday since losing Devin where I felt a sense of peace, though that peace was short-lived.

Parents in this country have fought for years to pass KOSA with broad support only to watch it die in the House when Big Tech's demands were made more of a priority than our kids.

The Kids Online Safety Act would provide a duty of care, something that our children—social media’s most vulnerable of users—deserve. It would set parental controls to the highest of settings by default, give our children options to better protect their private information, turn off addictive product features, and opt out of the algorithms these companies use to target children and keep them online for as long as possible. It would give the power back to the user and the parents, finally recognizing that social media companies—like every other industry in the world—have a responsibility to, at the very least, not knowingly put our children in harm's way as a matter of product design. It would hold them accountable not for the actions of others but for their own.

I am blessed to work closely with Congresswoman Angie Craig, who represents my district. It is an honor and a privilege that my family and I do not take lightly. I proudly serve on Congresswoman Craig’s Mental Health & Substance Use Disorder Committee with fellow bereaved parents, medical professionals, and law enforcement officials.

Last July, she introduced in the House the Cooper Davis & Devin Norring Act. My family is honored and sincerely thanks Cooper’s family for allowing Devin’s name to be placed beside Cooper’s. Both of these young men should still be here and could still be here had social media companies taken any responsibility for the rampant harm being caused by their products.

Last fall, families were invited to the DEA’s National Family Summit. I encourage all of you to visit the DEA Headquarters and view the thousands of faces lost to fentanyl poisoning. The pictures of babies—our children—alongside famous musicians line the walls of two entire buildings.

It was at the DEA Summit that we were informed that China is shipping the chemicals to ports on the East Coast. From there, they are often then shipped to Mexico, where fentanyl is created. I was angry hearing that. In simple terms, we are aiding in the poisoning of our own people. That is unacceptable.

Last year, DEA labs reported that 7 out of 10 pills contained a deadly dose of illicit fentanyl. According to former DEA Administrator Anne Milgram, it has since

gone down to 5 out of 10 pills. That brings me zero comfort. When Devin was killed, it was 3 out of 10 pills.

What this signals to me is that the cartels are watching how we respond to this crisis. They see parents scrambling to educate the public on the dangers of these pills, and they are responding to that. They are changing their “business model”. Methamphetamine use is on the rise where I live; xylazine, nitazines, parafluorofentanyl, ISO, and carfentanil have infiltrated the drug supply. Every drug is tainted with fentanyl. The emergence of these pills containing multiple drugs, such as fentanyl, xylazine, and methamphetamine, is becoming far too common.

I have fought alongside other families like mine to get fentanyl rescheduled into a Schedule 1 drug in Minnesota. We were told by medical professionals that the problem is that one slight change to the composition creates a new strain that no longer falls under that scheduling. This means that a slight change makes it a low-level drug offense.

On November 12, 2024, Business Insider published an article titled, “Iran has likely developed fentanyl-based chemical weapons”. The article goes on to say, “Pharmaceutical-based agents, or PBAs, are essentially weaponized medicines that incapacitate or kill their victims depending on the exposure. Iran may have given PBAs to its proxies, such as Hezbollah, which could use them to kidnap Israeli troops and civilians.” (See here: <https://www.businessinsider.com/iran-chemical-fentanyl-pharmaceutical-based-weapons-2024-11>.) This in itself is a threat to our great nation, a threat that should not be overlooked.

I want to say a special thank you to Senator Klobuchar, who represents my state. Three years ago, after she came to Dakota County to speak on the opioid crisis, I was able to speak with her directly. At the time, the public’s focus was on TikTok. I expressed that while the focus was heavily on TikTok, kids in my community were still dying from lethal pills being obtained on Snapchat. She made a promise that she was going to take on Big Tech, and to this day, she has kept her word. I thank her for that. I wish the same energy spent focused on TikTok was applied to other companies like Snap, Meta, and Google.

Big Tech has proven over and over again that they will not responsibly police themselves. That is where you all come into play. The Kids Online Safety Act, the Cooper Davis & Devin Norring Act, and the HALT Fentanyl Act bills are all valuable and pertinent tools in the toolbox to hopefully put an end to this crisis so that not one more parent loses their child and not one more family loses their loved one in a situation that could and should have been avoided.

I support the HALT Fentanyl Act, as I do not believe these precursors have any true benefit being in the hands of the public. I am not a medical professional, but I do believe that these precursors should be open to medical research only. These chemicals have no business being sold to any unlicensed medical professional.

I look to all of you this session to come together to protect our children and the people of this great country. I look to you to pass the HALT Fentanyl Act, KOSA, and the Cooper Davis & Devin Norring Act. I look to my government to come together and tackle this crisis by treating it as the public health crisis that it is.

Parents like myself, Mr. Puerta, Amy Neville, Andrea Thomas, Deb Schmill, and so many others cannot do this alone. Each of us is doing as much as we can to get the word out there in our communities and across the country, but we need you to stand with us and enact these pieces of legislation so that our country's kids stop dying.

Thank you for your time.