

Kansas State House of Representatives
House and Human Services Committee
HB 2217 Letter of Support

Distinguished members of the House and Human Services Committee,

My name is Fred Farris and in addition to being a Detective Sergeant with the Lenexa Police Department, I am also the Board of Directors President of the Kansas City Metro Tactical Officers Association. This association provides training, logistical support and representation for special operations officers, tactical medics, K9 and bomb techs representing over 90 agencies in five states. I have been in law enforcement for nearly 27 years and prior to that, I was a firefighter/EMT for seven years.

In 34 years of Emergency Services, I have had the sad misfortune of seeing many individuals that had either overdosed or died tragic deaths because of opioid ingestion. Some were accidental and others were not but many could have been prevented had drugs like Noxalone (Narcan) been more readily available to first responders such as police officers, firefighters or EMT's. While not every death could have been averted, a great many could have. I have seen firsthand the rapid effects of Narcan in such circumstances and that is the reason I jumped at the opportunity to work on this project with such a noble group of professionals, from across the medical and law enforcement fields, who also understood the critical importance of this legislation.

When I began my career, opioid overdoses were not the common occurrences that we see today. Advanced Life Support (ALS) / Paramedic Units carried Narcan and had the ability to administer this life saving drug and I have witnessed patients literally come to life after receiving a dose of Narcan. I am saddened that we now face a problem across this nation in which these incidents are now so common that we are here before you asking for a change in the law allowing more emergency services personnel to administer Narcan. We all too often see those faces in our communities that have used drugs like Heroin, Fentanyl, and Oxycodone recreationally and without knowing the true danger they face. These drugs are so powerful and fast acting that these individuals are sometimes overcome so quickly that they don't even have time to call for help and are found by friends or family members. Having police officers with the ability to administer Narcan, when they are oftentimes the first to arrive on the scene, could literally be the difference between life and death.

A second frightening scenario is playing out in agencies across the continent and is of equal importance as you consider this legislation. The accidental exposure to opioids by law enforcement has occurred as officers are processing evidence, moving items, or entering unknowingly into environments where drugs like Fentanyl are present. In June 2016 the Drug Enforcement Administration released a video to police and the public warning of the dangers of exposure to drugs like

Fentanyl. In the video, two New Jersey detectives describe in frightening detail how they inadvertently came into contact with Fentanyl and were virtually helpless as their bodies began immediately shutting down. In September 2016 in Hartford, Conn., 11 SWAT officers were exposed to fentanyl and heroin after raw drug powder became airborne during a bust in which police seized 50,000 bags of processed heroin as well as 350 grams of raw narcotics and had to be transported to the hospital. Fentanyl, often made in clandestine labs in Mexico, can be up to 50 times more powerful than heroin and puts our police officers in grave danger if exposed.

When speaking of a similar incident in September 2016, an officer with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police described an accidental exposure she had in which she immediately experienced the effects of the drug. She was administered Naloxone (Narcan) which quickly reversed the effects. She was quoted as saying "It takes a second for you to be exposed and another second for you to die. And we all want to go home at the end of the day."

Having the ability to carry and administer Narcan not only allows police officers to rapidly intervene and potentially save a life, but it could also be used to save their own life or the life of their partner. With required training and access to this drug, law enforcement officers across the United States are realizing the life saving capabilities they can have at their fingertips.

While there can be a reasonable debate as to how we have come to this epidemic problem and debate treatments, punishments, and personal accountability, there can be no doubt that this is an option that is greatly needed by our emergency responders.

I would urge you to consider that the group bringing this issue before you is diverse and represents all of those that will be faced with the contact and treatment of patients, victims, and innocents that may have a lethal exposure to opioids. We are in agreement that this legislation is a responsible and well thought out response to a problem that has no foreseeable end in sight.

Respectfully submitted,

Sergeant Fred J. Farris