



*American Academy of Forensic Sciences  
American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors  
International Association for Identification  
International Association of Forensic Nurses  
National Association of Medical Examiners  
Society of Forensic Toxicologists/ American Board of  
Forensic Toxicology*

Dear Senator Shaheen,

We are writing to express our support and gratitude for your introduction of S.2008, the Combating the Opioid Epidemic Through Forensic Drug Testing Act of 2017. The opioid crisis is crippling the forensic community as well as impacting our judicial system. Forensic science laboratories analyze drugs and toxicology samples submitted by over 19,000 law enforcement agencies nationwide, forensic pathologists perform medicolegal death investigations, and forensic toxicology laboratories analyze biological specimens from these autopsies to accurately determine the cause and manner of the death of potential drug overdose cases.

For the laboratories, the data derived from analyzing these drugs in the drug chemistry sections and the biological specimens taken from drivers and decedents in our toxicology sections are of vital importance to policy development in public health (e.g., drug treatment and death investigation) and public safety (e.g., drug control and illicit drug trends). The National Laboratory Information System (NFLIS) data shows that our member labs have seen an increase of over 6000% in fentanyl and fentanyl analog cases from 2012-2016. This increase corresponds directly with the overdose deaths being reported nationwide. NFLIS contains data supplied by approximately 94% of forensic science laboratories, representing the vast majority of federal, state, county, local, and private forensic science service providers. Medical examiner and coroner offices have also seen a dramatic increase in the number of autopsies required, causing several to lose and others being at risk of losing their laboratory's critical accreditation status due to lack of staffing.

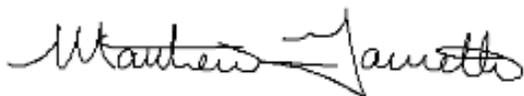
Despite this clear and present crisis, federal resources have not largely been increased to counter this threat. Forensic science practitioners are struggling with personal and laboratory safety issues related to highly potent fentanyl analogs such as carfentanil, which is 10,000 times more lethal than morphine. Recent reports indicate a significant increase in drug submissions to laboratories. In addition, law enforcement entities are being advised not to test these substances in the field due to potential exposure to potent opioids, thus due to a number of etiologies many more cases are being sent to the laboratory. Laboratories are being forced to deal with an increase in the potential safety issues of these potent drugs. Laboratory safety equipment like dedicated safety hoods, hazmat suits, air purifying respirators (APR), gloves, and doses of Narcan for dealing with potential exposures make it fiscally challenging for federal, state, county, and local forensic science practitioners. Narcan alone can cost a laboratory system thousands of dollars and must be replaced every 18 months. One of the largest shifts in this crisis is the requirement for labs to obtain new reference standards for each new drug produced. While labs were seeing relatively few types of drugs, recently labs have been overrun with a proliferation of novel psychoactive substances (NPS). Each substance requires extensive time, money, and instrumentation to investigate the physical properties and obtain appropriate reference samples.

A single instrument required for solid dose drug analysis costs approximately \$120,000 while a single toxicology instrument for identifying drugs in blood and urine samples costs approximately \$350,000. State and local labs are struggling to obtain this instrumentation, staffing needs, resources for the training of new and existing employees, and build laboratory space in which to put these instruments, while operating under already tight budgets. State and local forensic science

providers desperately need the help of the federal government to immediately address this crisis until state, county, and local funds can be identified and appropriated. The backlogs continue to grow even with the ability, which should continue, for states to outsource to private toxicology labs as needed.

Senator, we are grateful for your attention to this matter as we are fighting a war on opioids without either the tools or the much-needed data to do so. Your legislation will help us to begin to address some of these safety, capacity, instrumental, and investigative needs.

Thank you,



Matthew Gamette M.S., C.P.M.  
Chair,  
Consortium of Forensic Science  
Organizations



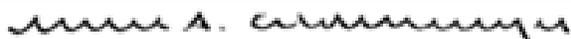
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