



*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*

The Honorable Ed Markey  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Sherrod Brown  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Markey and Senator Brown:

We are writing to you in support of S.708, the International Narcotics Trafficking Response by Detecting Incoming Contraband with Technology (INTERDICT) Act.

The Consortium of Forensic Science Organizations represents over 21,000 forensic science practitioners that are currently fighting on the front lines of the opioid epidemic. This is a matter of grave importance that is growing exponentially in our medical examiner/coroner offices and forensic science laboratories. Despite some media attention and recent significant Congressional appropriations in response to the current drug crisis, the forensic science community's key role has been overlooked and represents a critical gap in the federal response.

The forensic science community includes forensic pathologists who perform the autopsies in medical examiner/coroner offices, the forensic toxicologists who perform the toxicological analyses in overdose cases, the forensic drug chemists who perform the testing on seized drug samples, and others in the forensic science community (such as fingerprint examiners and DNA analysts) that perform critical examinations in supportive roles during the investigative process. In combination, these vital components play a major role in the detection, identification, and ultimate prosecution of individuals responsible for the current crisis.

Our state and local medicolegal death investigation systems (medical examiner and coroner offices) are currently overburdened with the investigation of drug overdose cases, which, increasingly, are being determined to be the result of the ingestion of synthetic opioids such as illicit fentanyl and fentanyl analogs such as carfentanil. Offices, such as the Connecticut State Medical Examiner's Office, have lost accreditation because of the increase in the number of autopsies performed.<sup>1</sup> Other offices, such as the State of Maryland Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, are threatened to lose their accreditation due to the increase in the number of autopsies performed and lack of professional staff.<sup>2</sup> In fact, some jurisdictions have stopped performing autopsies and conducting forensic toxicology analyses in apparent overdose cases, paradoxically because of the added burdens on their offices from the opioid crisis.<sup>3</sup>

State and local governments simply cannot cope with the rapidly rising expenses that the opioid epidemic and crisis are forcing upon them. As these entities struggle with the investigative and analytical needs that this crisis requires, it has become difficult to stay on top of the statistics. The result of the state and local overload is the CDC's underreporting drug overdoses.<sup>4</sup>

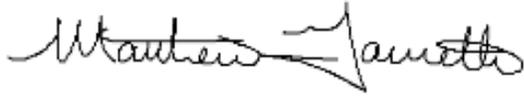
The federal government has an interest in the accuracy of the reported overdose death data. The scope of the crisis is best understood by the number of overdose deaths, and that number will also be a measure by which the federal government will gauge its success in combatting the crisis. This data comes from state and local medical examiners and coroners, who need additional resources from the federal government to investigate the cases and provide vital, timely data. Furthermore, these offices are an important component of surveillance for new drugs, and an important source of investigational information for law enforcement interdiction efforts.

We are pleased that S.708 explicitly funds drug chemistry equipment for the U.S. Customs and Border Protection, which could prevent the amount of drugs coming into our country. The great need for this equipment at international points of entry is clear, as most drugs are manufactured outside the U.S. We do believe that that the state and local communities also require assistance, and we look forward to working with you.

We support your legislation and urge you and other Members of Congress to work toward helping the state and local forensic science provider community as well.

#### References:

1. <https://www.usnews.com/news/connecticut/articles/2017-02-15/connecticut-medical-examiners-office-loses-accreditation>
2. <https://www.rt.com/usa/385083-maryland-heroin-crisis-autopsy/>
3. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/opioid-crisis-strains-medical-examiners-1493812801>
4. <http://www.cnn.com/2017/04/24/health/opioid-deaths-cdc-report/>



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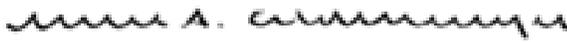
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