

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell

Spokane Fentanyl Presser

October 24, 2024

Sen. Cantwell Opening Remarks

[\[AUDIO\]](#) [\[VIDEO\]](#)

Sen. Cantwell: Thank you all very much for being here. I want to thank Mayor Brown, Spokane Police Department Chief Kevin Hall, obviously our very own Spokane Sheriff John Nowles, thank you so much, and the Spokane Board of Commissioners. I want to thank Chris Jordan for being here. Also. I know we have Zack Zappone, Kitty Klitzke, Chris Jordan, and Julie O'berg also representing the city in various capacities, thank you all for being here.

I want to thank Mayor Brown, Chief Hall, Commissioner Cooney, who couldn't make it, Sheriff Nowles, for joining us today here to talk about how the city of Spokane, and we nationally, continue to fight against the scourge of fentanyl.

We're here to say that we need more federal resources to help fight back. That Spokane, like other states across the United States and like other cities in the state of Washington, we need to partner and coordinate on resources that will help us fight back.

I thank the Mayor for inviting us to discuss the resources needed in Spokane, specifically with the city, and Sheriff Nowles for outlining the Spokane County treatment resource facility needs, and for the City of Spokane talking about its mobile units.

Here in Spokane, the Fire Department Engine #1 is the busiest fire engine in the state, primarily because of the epidemic of drug overdoses. A typical fire engine responds to about 2,000 calls a year. This year, SPD's Engine #1 is on pace to respond to 6,300 calls.

Fentanyl and other synthetic opioids are to blame for this alarming rise. These drugs are significantly more lethal than other narcotics. The Mexican drug cartels manufacture illicit fentanyl using chemicals they buy from a variety of places, but the Chinese Triad and these cartels then smuggle the deadly pills into our country.

Fentanyl comes across the border in passenger vehicles, in trucks, in trains, and in commercial cargo. So we must have a coordinated effort at every level of government to stem the flow of illicit synthetic drugs into our communities, and to prevent those deaths from overdose.

So, as part of that more robust effort, we need to disrupt the supply chain and the financing of drugs particularly. That is why last spring we passed the FEND Off Fentanyl Act, which was signed by the President, to increase sanctions against criminal organizations that traffic fentanyl. Importantly, that law that's now in place also allows us to sell the assets of those organizations and use that money for much needed law enforcement efforts.

In addition, in September I introduced the Stop Smuggling Illicit Synthetic Drugs on U.S. Transportation Networks Act. This was after much consultation and work with the Secretary of Homeland Security, the Customs and Border Protection Agency, the Transportation Security Administration, the U.S. Coast

Guard, and the Department of Commerce's NIST agency, the National Institute for Standards and Technology.

This legislation creates a task force to increase information sharing among our federal agencies with our state and local law enforcement authorities to prevent the smuggling of fentanyl through all types of our transportation network, through commercial trucking, commercial air and air cargo, trains and our maritime cargo.

This legislation provides grants for advanced detection technology, for drug sniffing canines to help state, local, and tribal law enforcement root out local fentanyl distribution rings. These drugs can be sniffed out by canine units. I know that Spokane doesn't currently have canines to detect fentanyl, but we hope that these federal efforts will get them those kinds of resources. And there are advanced technologies that are helping with detection of fentanyl vapors, and that's why we want to increase this resource and funding.

The bill also would increase federal support to state and local crime scene investigators and forensic laboratories. It would help them process evidence in the fentanyl related crime investigations more quickly, giving law enforcement the type of actionable information that is necessary, and it would help with our neighboring tribal law enforcement and coordination as well.

Now let's not forget two other federal programs that we think should work collaboratively with this, the COPS and Byrne JAG grant program. In the last three years, law enforcement in the Spokane region received nearly \$600,000 in funding from the Byrne JAG program. I think that probably went to mostly equipment. Spokane Valley received \$1.25 million to hire 10 full time police officers. With this funding, what is essential is that agencies work across jurisdictions to try to fight this scourge.

In addition, in response to what Spokane County and the Sheriff is asking, Senator Murray and I are trying to secure, before the end of this year, \$3 million in funding for the Spokane Regional Stabilization Center. This funding would allow organizations to expand their counseling, medication, and assisted treatment services for people who may not be able to get seen in other parts of our system.

Last year, the center served over 1,500 people, but it can't meet all of the needs in the Spokane area. Over 100 people died using fentanyl in [Spokane County] in just the first five months of this year. It's clear that more people in in Spokane could be helped if we add capacity to the regional center. So right now, that is what we're fighting for, and it's moved through our legislative process, and we hope that it will see funding by the end of this year.

The center would help add a 23-hour crisis relief and sobering process, and it would help divert those resources that now might get seen at more expensive places like the emergency center, and we have seen that these stabilization centers have worked in other parts of the state of Washington.

With this expansion, it would be able to see more people, and I'll let Sheriff Nowles talk, maybe, or the county, talk a little bit more about that, but it would make a real difference on the ground. And so we hope we will get across the finish line.

We are here today because we want people to know that these resources are worth fighting for. We want, besides the FEND Off Fentanyl Act, to have Congress put more focus onto this. We think that if we all work with these resources at the federal and state level, and at the local level, and give local law enforcement and our first responders more tools, it will help.

We also know that the City of Spokane, like so many other cities, are requesting support for mobile units. Instead of having to have the Spokane department respond, having a smaller unit be able to go out and respond to these crises, would also be very helpful.

So, again, thank you all for being here today, and I think I'm turning it over to Mayor Brown. Thank you, Mayor.