

Spokane Police Chief Kevin Hall – Opening Remarks

Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation Hearing Titled: Interdicting Illicit Drug Trafficking: A View from the Front Lines

February 26, 2025

[VIDEO](#) | [AUDIO](#)

Police Chief Kevin Hall: Chairman Cruz, Ranking Member Cantwell, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the fentanyl crisis, an issue of national urgency that devastates communities across the country, including my own, Spokane, Washington.

My name is Kevin Hall. I'm honored to serve as Police Chief for the City of Spokane, the second largest city in the State of Washington. I was appointed to the position in August of 2024 after previously serving more than 32 years in the Tucson Police Department in Tucson, Arizona. the last nearly eight years as Assistant Chief.

My 33-year career in policing has focused on violent crime, addressing the impacts of drugs and drug trafficking and public safety at both local and national levels. Since 2019, the annual number of opioid drug overdoses has doubled in Washington state and Spokane's opioid deaths have surpassed the state's average.

Recent reports by the CDC and DEA illustrate a national decline in fatal drug overdoses are not the reality in Washington state. The Spokane Fire Department's calls for overdoses have increased 30% in 2024 over the previous year.

Like every other urban police agency in the country, the Spokane Police Department continues to allocate more and more resources to address open air drug use, fatal drug overdoses and the overall harm caused to the community by fentanyl. The Spokane County Medical Examiner reported at least 346 opioid related deaths last year, over 75% involving fentanyl.

The economic toll is staggering. The Senate's Joint Economic Committee estimated the opioid crisis cost the U.S. \$1.5 trillion in 2020 alone.

Fentanyl's impact stems from its potency: 40 to 50 times more lethal than heroin and its alarming accessibility. From my experience in Southern Arizona, I know that most fentanyl enters the U.S. through legal ports of entry, concealed in commercial cargo trucks, passenger vehicles, trailers and RVs.

Recent seizures highlight the scale of trafficking along transportation routes. In Tucson, law enforcement intercepted 1.7 million fentanyl pills in just two stops in late 2024. Spokane's supply chain follows similar patterns, moving drugs from Mexico along interstates, I-19, I-10 and I-5, before reaching Eastern Washington via I-90.

Spokane officers have recently encountered bulk powder fentanyl, an emerging and highly dangerous trend.

Fentanyl trafficking has direct and violent consequences. A harrowing example of this occurred in Spokane when an investigation where traffickers, using I-90, transported bulk fentanyl pill loads to Spokane from the Tri-Cities area. Spokane PD and federal partners, after an intensive investigation, interdicted the trafficker, resulting in a violent midday shoot out with Spokane police officers that endangered innocents, including small children who were in the area. 2,000 fentanyl pills received from the car that the suspect was traveling in.

Elsewhere in Washington, drug traffickers have used commercial trucks, passenger rail, and even commercial airlines, as seen in a 2023 investigation at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, where 400,000 fentanyl pills were found in checked baggage. The U S Department of Homeland Security estimated that drug traffickers were bringing millions of pills a month into the Seattle region via drug couriers checked luggage.

Another separate investigation Seattle in the fall 2024 culminated in the arrest of 12 violent fentanyl traffickers, the seizure of significant amounts of fentanyl dozens of weapons and highlighted what effective federal and local law enforcement partnerships look like. With the Department of Homeland Security, Seattle Police Department, US Attorney General's Office among the agencies involved, this investigation directly stemmed from the previously mentioned checked baggage investigation at SeaTac Airport.

Interdicting fentanyl requires strong partnerships between local, state, federal and tribal agencies. We must enhance these collaborations with improved technology and resources.

That is why I respectfully urge Congress to pass the Stop Smuggling Illicit Synthetic Drugs on US Transportation Networks Act.

This legislation would expand non-intrusive inspection technologies such as drive-through and mobile X-ray sensors, specialized canine resources, vapor technology, to strengthen our ability to detect and disrupt fentanyl trafficking before it reaches our streets.

The fight against fentanyl is urgent. It's real. Strengthening our enforcement capabilities will save lives. Thank you for your time, and I welcome any questions.