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New House Bill Seeks to Transform Education on Fentanyl

Naja Johnson, News Editor

House Bill 1956 was passed in the Washington State House of Representatives Feb. 9, and is currently working its way through the Senate Committee as of Feb. 21. The bill was first introduced in December of 2023 and has been in the works for quite some time. The bill, if passed in the senate, would require schools to address fentanyl through substance use disorder prevention through education.

Mari Leavitt is a state representative for the 28th district of Washington. Leavitt was the primary sponsor and spent the interim working on the bill.

“What brought me to the bill is our youth are dying, particularly those under 24, to opioid and fentanyl poisoning,” she said.

Leavitt expressed that fentanyl has endangered youth without them even knowing it. She also explained that opioids and fentanyl is the number one cause of death for those under 30.

“Many folks are not choosing fentanyl; they’re taking Adderall or Percocet, thinking that something that they’re taking is one thing and finding out it’s not. Unfortunately, fentanyl is 50 times more potent than heroin, and as a result, the tolerance in one’s body is not high for a drug like that,” Leavitt explained.

Leavitt described the importance of education when it comes to substances such as fentanyl.

“It’s really important to educate our youth and make sure that they know the dangers. Also, they’ll be able to identify the symptoms within themselves and their friends.”

David Hackney is a representative for the 11th district of Washington and one of the sponsors of the bill. He shared that he feels the bill would be a step in the right direction and would help protect youth.

“We need comprehensive action from education. Education is key,” Hackney said.

Hackney expressed how fentanyl is impacting communities across Washington state.



Jake Nelson

MDMA capsule. Fentanyl laced Psychostimulant overdose deaths in the United States have more than quadrupled over the past ten years according to the national institute on drug abuse.

"I spoke with a Native American chief who was concerned that fentanyl would kill his whole tribe," Hackney said.

Hackney, also a former federal prosecutor, addressed the discrepancies in legislation when it comes to controlled substances.

"Some drugs are so dangerous they should be illegal. If you expose a dependent child to meth it's a felony. If you expose a dependent child to fentanyl it's a misdemeanor," Hackney shared.

Hackney shared that if the bill is passed it would help legislators actively work against substance use disorders in Washington state.

"Success breeds success. As legislators, we need to use every tool in our toolbox to keep people safe," Hackney said.

Jenn Gladish is a mother of three and a Seattle resident. Gladish weighed in on the bill and expressed her thoughts as a parent.

"My immediate thoughts were that education is the first line of defense against ensuring that children that are getting into those types of high school and college years are adequately informed before trying new things and having new experiences. They must be aware of the risks," Gladish said.

Gladish believes that HB1956 will be a great resource to fight the opioid epidemic in Washington State and will work to serve youth. She also stated that the timing for the bill was appropriate.

"I think it's a step in the right direction, I don't think any faster was appropriate. We needed to see if the epidemic was to develop or if it was going to remain stagnant."

Gladish provided a perspective on how fortified education can provide students with the necessary skills whilst navigating the opioid epidemic.

"I think that education is impactful in that way too. They need to know that there are risks for things outside of what they'd be consenting to. Just general living and the potential to breathe in substances that can harm you indefinitely," Gladish ended.

As HB1956 works its way through the senate, Washington state youth and their counterparts await to see how the presence of the opioid epidemic will be combated in the state of Washington.