



Maine Sheriffs' Association

"One Team, One Mission"

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April 18, 2023

L.D. 986 – An Act To Ensure Safer Communities by Increasing the Punishment for Crimes Involving Fentanyl

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice, my name is Eric Samson. I am the Sheriff of Androscoggin County and here on behalf of the Maine Sheriffs Association.

Maine sheriffs discussed this bill and those present voted unanimously to support LD 986 – An Act To Ensure Safer Communities by Increasing the Punishment for Crimes Involving Fentanyl.

The war on drugs in 2023, is significantly different than it was even ten years ago, before any of us had heard about the drug, Fentanyl. Decision-makers need to understand that this drug is 100 times more potent than morphine and 50 times more potent than heroin and it's here. It's in Maine. It's killing the very people everyone in this room is tasked to protect.

Three hundred and fifty-four Maine citizens lost their lives in overdose deaths in 2018. That number increased to three hundred and eighty the following year. The upward trend continued to five hundred and two in 2020, six hundred and thirty-one in 2021, and seven hundred and fifteen in 2022. We've seen a steady and devastating increase in overdose deaths in Maine.

The Mills administration released a statement regarding the skyrocketing number of overdoses in Maine in 2022. In this report, we learned that 80% of the fatal drug overdoses that occurred in 2022 were due to this most lethal drug, Fentanyl.

Opponents of this bill may use the mantra, "We can't arrest our way out of the drug war." We've all heard that position time and again and yet as I've illustrated, the death toll continues to rob us of family members, friends, and members of our communities.

Increasing the penalties for trafficking the drug that is killing Maine people is good legislation. Adding the crime of electronic communication to traffic fentanyl is another tool law enforcement needs to prosecute those that recklessly seek to profit on the lives of Maine people.

Maine sheriffs commend Representative Farrin for bringing this timely and critical legislation forward and we urge members of this committee to unanimously support the passage of L.D. 986. I welcome any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Sheriff Eric Samson
Maine Sheriffs' Association