

A RESOLUTION

25-342

IN THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

November 7, 2023

To declare the sense of the Council that the District is experiencing an opioid and fentanyl crisis and that the Mayor should declare a public health emergency.

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, That this resolution may be cited as the “Sense of the Council on the Opioid and Fentanyl Epidemic Resolution of 2023”.

Sec. 2. The Council finds that:

(1) The District is experiencing an alarming and escalating crisis associated with the use of opioids and fentanyl, which poses a substantial threat to the well-being and safety of its residents. The opioid crisis is considered an epidemic by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (“CDC”) because it has reached an alarming level of severity and is having a significant impact on public health. The crisis is characterized by a sharp increase in the misuse and addiction to opioid drugs, such as prescription painkillers and heroin. Urgent and strategic action is imperative to address this public health emergency.

(2) A public health emergency is a situation that presents a significant and immediate danger to a population's health and well-being. The opioid crisis is considered a public health emergency due to factors such as high mortality rates, widespread impact, strain on healthcare systems, spread of infectious diseases through needle sharing, harm to families and communities, economic costs, treatment barriers, and the preventable nature of opioid addiction. The United States Department of Health and Human Services has declared that a public health emergency exists nationwide because of the opioid crisis.

(3) Data from the District's Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (“OCME”) reveals a distressing pattern of opioid-related deaths, with a substantial percentage involving the potent and lethal substance, fentanyl. OCME has investigated a total of 2269 deaths due to the use of opioids from January 1, 2017, through May 31, 2023. Over the past 5 years, the District has seen a steady increase in the number of opioid-related fatal overdoses.

(4) In 2018, there were 213 opioid-related fatal overdoses in the District. In 2021, the District witnessed 430 tragic fatalities resulting from opioid overdoses, with a staggering 95% of these cases involving fentanyl or a fentanyl analog. In the subsequent year, 2022, the

District recorded 461 fatal opioid overdose incidents, with 96% linked to fentanyl or a fentanyl analog. As of May 2023, the District had already experienced 192 fatal opioid-related overdoses, indicating that rates are continuing to increase. In comparison, just 9 years ago, in 2014, the District had only 83 opioid-related fatal overdoses.

(5) The devastating consequences of this crisis include an increasing number of fatalities, overdoses, as well as long-lasting social and economic implications for the District. According to the CDC, in 2017, the most recent year for which CDC data is available, the combined cost of opioid use disorder and fatal opioid overdoses in the District exceeded \$3 billion. These costs encompass various sectors, including healthcare, the criminal justice system, social services, public health and prevention programs, child welfare and foster care, productivity losses, and expenses associated with overdose reversal medications.

(6) Certain populations bear a disproportionately heavy burden of this public health emergency due to social determinants of health, health disparities, entrenched historical and systemic racism, as well as federal and local drug policy.

(7) OCME reported that between 2017 and 2023, 85% of those who died from opioid overdoses in the District were Black residents.

(8) A significant number of Black men between the ages of 50-69, who were previously chronic heroin users, are tragically succumbing to fatal overdoses primarily caused by the prevalence of fentanyl, as heroin has become increasingly scarce.

(9) OCME reported that from 2017 to May 2023, opioid overdoses, including fatal overdoses, were most prevalent in Wards 5, 7, and 8.

(10) The alarming increase in opioid use among our youth population has raised significant concerns, with the risk of fatal and non-fatal overdoses increasing over the past 5-6 years. According to OCME, there have been 26 confirmed fatalities attributed to opioids for individuals aged 19 and under since 2017. Furthermore, since 2019, the DC Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department has responded to 101 cases of both fatal and non-fatal opioid overdoses involving individuals aged 1 to 19 years old.

(11) By declaring a public health emergency, the District can better harness vital resources, enact emergency measures, legislation, and policy changes, and foster heightened collaboration among a diverse range of stakeholders to confront this crisis with utmost urgency.

(12) A public health emergency declaration will raise public awareness about the severity of the crisis, fostering a sense of urgency and encouraging community engagement. This will empower individuals to seek help, access vital resources, and contribute to the collective effort of combating the opioid and fentanyl epidemic.

(13) A public health emergency declaration will empower District leaders to streamline communication and coordination among healthcare providers, community organizations, law enforcement agencies, and other pertinent entities, thus ensuring a more coordinated and efficient response.

ENROLLED ORIGINAL

Sec. 3. It is the sense of the Council that the Mayor should declare the opioid and fentanyl crisis in the District of Columbia a public health emergency, recognizing the gravity of the situation and committing sufficient resources to safeguarding the well-being of our residents.

Sec. 4. The Council shall transmit a copy of this resolution, upon its adoption, to the Mayor, Director of the Department of Behavioral Health, Director of the Department of Health, Chief of the Metropolitan Police Department, Chief Medical Examiner, and Chief of the Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department.

Sec. 5. This resolution shall take effect immediately.