

By **Lora Lavigne**, WRAL anchor/reporter

RALEIGH, N.C. — Tuesday morning, a step is being taken in the fight against the fentanyl and opioid crisis in North Carolina.

Lawmakers and families impacted by the opioid and fentanyl crisis will show up at the legislative building Tuesday morning to push for tighter laws.

Eight North Carolinians die each day from fentanyl poisoning, and more than 13,300 died from fentanyl overdoses between 2013 to November 2022.

A bill sponsored by Senator Danny Britt and Michael Lazzara seeks harsher punishment for fentanyl and opioid drug offenses.

These punishments include higher fines for trafficking and more charges for anyone responsible for the death of someone who dies from using the drugs.

Victims' families are trying to raise awareness about the dangers in the community.

The press conference today begins Tuesday at 10 a.m.

The bill goes before the Senate Judiciary Committee Tuesday at 11 a.m.

North Carolina in crisis

More than 40 families came together Saturday at the Public Safety and Justice Conference at NC State University.



'I want to save a life' Families raise awareness for fentanyl poisoning at Public Safety and Justice Conference

Barb Walsh, founder and executive director of the Fentanyl Victims Network of North Carolina, lost her daughter 24-year-old daughter, Sophia, to fentanyl poisoning. Now she's trying to connect others who've lost loved ones to fentanyl.

"Other people who lost a child to fentanyl, or loved one, they shouldn't stand alone," Walsh said. "I felt like we would all be stronger if we stood together."

One of the people Walsh's group helps support is Jessica Gyant, who lost her son on New Years Day in 2021.

"January 1, 2021, I lost my son, Jerry Jeffery Snider Jr.," Gyant said. "I'm here today learn more about this drug, because I want to save a life."

The Fentanyl Victims Network of North Carolina wants to see fentanyl awareness speakers in middle and high schools across the state to vocalize the dangers of the drug.

The group also wants Naloxone, commonly known as Narcan, in every school, currently it is not.

FDA considering making naloxone available over-the-counter

According to the Center for Disease Control, as of 2022, fentanyl is the leading cause of death in North Carolina, and the United States, for people between the ages of 18 and 35.

In addition, according to the state, of the 9,116 medicine and drug toxicology deaths between 2020 and 2022, 8,002 involved fentanyl.

Mitchico Duff's daughter, Michiko, was one of those deaths.

"She was left alone, she was 23-years-old, she has a 6-year-old daughter that is left behind," Duff said.

Duff was joined by her other daughter and granddaughter at the event, where they called out for people to join them in raising awareness of the drug.

"We're asking the public to stand with us, to speak out. If you see something, say something." Duff said.

Attorney General Josh Stein also spoke at the event, where he told families he's asking the state legislature for funding for a fentanyl trafficking unit.