

Where are fentanyl victims' rights?

Drug-induced homicide killed my son



Illustration on fentanyl deaths and victims rights by Alexander Hunter/The Washington Times [more >](#)

COMMENTARY

By Kristy Dyroff - - Thursday, April 27, 2023

OPINION:

Victims of drug-induced homicide and their affected family members are not given the resources and recognition they deserve. I know this because I am one.

Wesley, my son, was a 22-year-old college student in 2007 when he injured his knee playing football with friends. As his mother, I sent him to our family physician for care. This was when our nightmare began. My son was prescribed increasingly higher doses of opioids for the pain, caught in the spiral of greed initiated by Purdue Pharma. Our entire family struggled through his addiction as he valiantly fought his way through half

a dozen rehab programs, intensive outpatient programs, halfway houses and Narcotics Anonymous. He finally found success at a faith-based, nine-month rehab program, where he developed his own faith and strength. I was overjoyed to have my kind, thoughtful, beautiful son back as the amazing gentle giant he had grown to be.

On Aug. 19, 2015, when my husband and I found him dead in his home after being sober for two years, I was devastated by the grief.

[Fentanyl](#) is a man-made synthetic opioid that can easily be produced in large quantities. Most illicit [fentanyl](#) is produced in Mexico with ingredients manufactured in China. It is 50 to 100 times stronger than heroin and is often mixed with other drugs and fillers. The amount of [fentanyl](#) necessary to kill most people is equivalent to three grains of salt. As of January of this year, according to the Drug Enforcement Administration, 6 of every 10 illicit pills purchased contain [fentanyl](#), killing 1 million Americans in the past 20 years.

My son was a victim of drug-induced homicide. Historically, it's been known as an overdose, but he didn't overdose. Like far too many Americans, he took one pill that ended up being pure [fentanyl](#) and died. He was poisoned because he trusted the wrong person and paid for it with his life.

My family is one of the lucky few that saw justice. Wesley's case was the first [fentanyl](#) case prosecuted by the U.S. attorney's office. His killer is now serving a 20-year sentence in federal prison.

Someone is sitting behind bars because they killed my son. I've had to bury a child, which no parent should ever have to do, and drag myself through a court case in the process. But like the millions of others who have lost loved ones in this way, the stigma of drug addiction prevents us from accessing resources that should be made available to us.

The Department of Justice's Office for Victims of Crime provides advocacy and resources for families and victims of violent crime, a fantastic program that wrongfully excludes drug-induced homicide victims and their families.

My congressman, Buddy Carter, has introduced important legislation to right this wrong. The Recognizing Victims of Illicit [Fentanyl](#) Poisoning Act would add these individuals to the list of recognized victims in DOJ's Crime Victims Fund, which supports programs and services that focus on helping victims and their families recover from the immediate aftermath of crime and continuing to support them as they rebuild their lives.

As a board member of the Drug-Induced Homicide Foundation, a nonprofit that has assisted hundreds of families struggling for justice for their loved ones lost to opioid poisoning, I wholeheartedly support this legislation.

As we recognize 2023 National Crime Victims' Rights Week, with the theme of elevating survivors' voices, we must create environments where survivors and their family members have the confidence that they will be heard, believed and supported.

We can help victims and family members of this epidemic by passing this bill and raising awareness about the dangers of [fentanyl](#). Education can lead to change that can eliminate the stigma no victim should ever feel.

- *Kristy Dyroff is a member of the Drug-Induced Homicide Foundation's board.*