

By **Carly Haynes**, WRAL reporter

A group of activists rallied outside the State Capitol Sunday afternoon to push for tougher punishments for people who illegally distribute fentanyl.

The group is pushing for two bills to pass, [Senate Bill 189](#) and [House Bill 250](#).

If the bills pass, it would broaden who gets criminally prosecuted for distributing fentanyl. As it stands, North Carolina is one of the few states that has a death-by-distribution law.

That law allows district attorneys to prosecute people who sell drugs that lead to an overdose death.

The bills would allow district attorneys to prosecute people for not just selling drugs, but for general distribution, even if there is no money involved.

"They would see the person who killed their son, or daughter, or wife or cousin in the courtroom," Executive Director of the Fentanyl Victims Network of North Carolina Barb Walsh said. "And there's no words for that."

Walsh and her group have been connecting family members of fentanyl overdose victims with one another to form a support group.

"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."

According to the North Carolina Office of the Medical Examiner, there were nearly 14,000 fentanyl-related deaths in the last nine years. In addition, WRAL's Data Trackers found people of color are dying from fentanyl overdoses at rates three and sometimes five times higher than in 2015.

North Carolina's crisis with fentanyl was the subject of a WRAL documentary, *Crisis Next Door*.