

## 'Unacceptable.' Rise in fentanyl-related deaths has parents, activists sounding alarm in NC



By [Sean Coffey](#)

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NORTH CAROLINA (WTVD) -- As parents and activists raise their voices for action on Fentanyl Awareness Day, new data from the Chief Medical Examiner's Office shows the fentanyl problem is only getting worse in North Carolina.

In fact, there were more fentanyl-related deaths reported in just the first five months of this year compared to all of 2016 and 2017 combined. In the last twelve months in North Carolina, there have been 3,433 reported fentanyl-related deaths.

"We're losing. we're losing kids. We're losing grandbabies. We're losing sisters, brothers, cousins, aunts, uncles, and it's unacceptable," said Barb Walsh, Executive Director of the non-profit Fentanyl Victims Network of North Carolina.

Walsh lost her daughter, Sophia, to Fentanyl in August of 2021, after she drank a water bottle she didn't know had fentanyl diluted in it. She said prosecutors' decision not to press charges was crushing.

"It's devastating to a family to know who killed your child and not be able to do anything about it," said Walsh.

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Now, she's pushing for legislative action. The [Fentanyl Victims Network](#) held a rally on Sunday outside the State Capitol to advocate for two bills, [SB 189](#) and [HB 250](#). SB 189, which has passed the House but remains in committee, would change the wording in North Carolina's current "death distribution law" from "sell" to "deliver" to make it easier to prosecute people providing bad drugs. HB 250 would require autopsies on all suspicious drug deaths.

Lynelle Esposito also knows what it feels like to lose a daughter after her 18-year-old Gabriella Aviles died at a friend's house just two months after Sophia.

"Gabriella was like my mini-me, she was always happy," Esposito said.

Now, she's trying to help other mothers who might face a similar tragedy.

"To help with awareness, so someone else didn't have to go through what we went through. What I'm going through without Gabriella being here," she said.