

HB22-1326 Fentanyl Accountability And Prevention

Tuesday, April 12 2022

House Judiciary 1:30 pm | Old State Library

Testimony: Support /Amend

Good afternoon Mr. Chair and fellow committee members.

My name is Adam Burg, and I'm the vice president of government affairs for the Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce.

I am here today to express our organization's general support for HB22-1326 - however we also hope to see the bill amended.

Colorado Public Radio reported in February that fentanyl fatalities in Colorado are rising faster than in any other state, except for Alaska. The impact of fentanyl in our state is shown not just in the data, but in the decay of community areas that are now saturated with narcotics, the regular headlines of overdose and fentanyl poisoning, and the very real impact addiction has on the lives of Coloradans and their loved ones.

This bill's introduction renews a conversation started by HB19-1263, which reduced certain drug possession charges from felonies to misdemeanor offenses. Opponents of the 2019 change say it has made it more difficult to punish dealers and is a contributing factor to the current crisis. Several legislators, law enforcement associations and the mayors of Colorado's two largest cities, Denver Mayor Michael Hancock and Colorado Springs Mayor John Suthers, have said misdemeanor charges are inadequate to address this issue.

The prevalence of fentanyl in every corner of our state has led to safety concerns that make Colorado a less desirable destination when recruiting businesses, undermines the value of infrastructure investments taxpayers have supported on the promise these improvements will lead to increased economic growth, and prevents metropolitan communities from confidently restoring downtown business activity.

We are supportive of House Bill 1326 as a necessary first step to address a multifaceted issue; however, we hope to see amendments that are proportional to the fatal impact of this drug.

The reality is, no amount of fentanyl is safe in our community, and it is imperative that we act quickly and firmly to bring this crisis to a halt. We believe that possession of less than 4 grams of fentanyl be a felony offense if we are to have a commensurate response to the severity, pervasiveness, and lethality of this crisis. We hope that there will be further discussion and careful consideration for a possible amendment.

We want to thank the sponsors for bringing forward this important legislation and I am happy to take any questions.