

2025

FINAL REPORT



The Task Force on Enforcement of
Fentanyl and Heroin Drug Violations

PURPOSE

Pursuant to Session Law 2023-123, Part IV, Sections 4(a) through 4(g), the North Carolina General Assembly established the Task Force on Enforcement of Fentanyl and Heroin Drug Violations (Task Force). The Task Force consists of the Secretary of Public Safety, the Director of the State Bureau of Investigation, the Commander of the State Highway Patrol, the Chairman of the North Carolina Sheriffs' Association, the President of the North Carolina Association of Chiefs of Police, and the Executive Director of the North Carolina Conference of District Attorneys, or their designees.

The purpose of the Task Force is to study ways to enhance the ability of law enforcement throughout the state to combat the illegal manufacturing, importation, and distribution of fentanyl, heroin, and other similar controlled substances. The Task Force met monthly in spring 2024 to draft the required interim report to the General Assembly when it convened in 2024. The interim report was submitted by the Chairman, Sheriff Charles Blackwood, on June 17, 2024. The Task Force is required to submit a final report, including findings and legislative recommendations, to the 2025 General Assembly. Upon filing this final report, the Task Force terminates.

DEFINITIONS/HISTORY/USAGE

“Fentanyl is a potent synthetic opioid drug approved by the Food and Drug Administration for use as an analgesic (pain relief) and anesthetic. It is approximately 100 times more potent than morphine and 50 times more potent than heroin as an analgesic. Fentanyl was first developed in 1959 and introduced in the 1960s as an intravenous anesthetic. It is legally manufactured and distributed in the United States. Licit fentanyl pharmaceutical products are diverted via theft, fraudulent prescriptions, and illicit distribution by patients, physicians, and pharmacists.

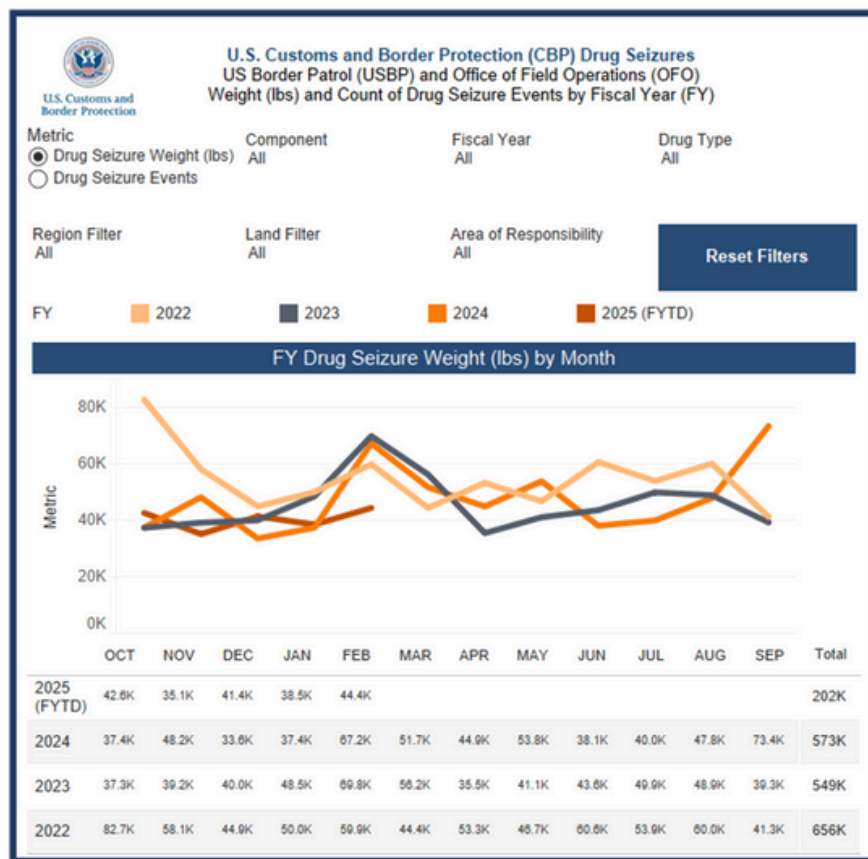
Heroin is a highly addictive drug, and it is a rapidly acting opioid. Heroin is processed from morphine, a naturally occurring substance extracted from the seed pod of certain varieties of poppy plants grown in: Mexico, South America, Southeast Asia (Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar (Burma)), and Southwest Asia (Afghanistan and Pakistan). Heroin comes in several forms, primarily white powder from Mexico and South America; and “black tar” and brown powder from Mexico.”¹

¹US Department of Justice, Drug Enforcement Administration, Drug Fact Sheet

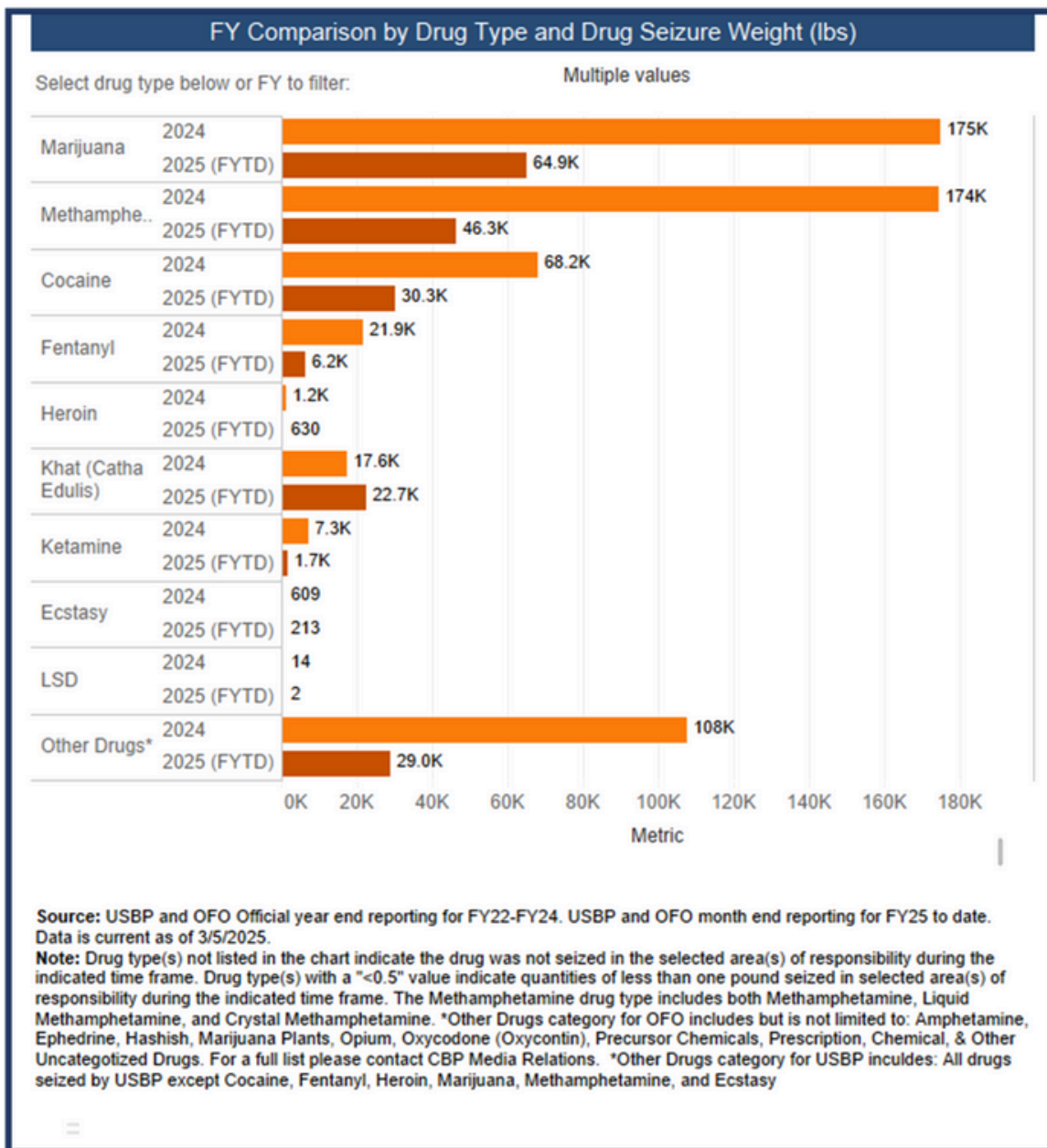
PREVALENCE/OVERDOSE DEATH STATISTICS

“From 2011 through 2018, both fatal overdoses associated with abuse of clandestinely produced fentanyl and fentanyl analogues, and law enforcement encounters increased markedly. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), fentanyl analogues were involved in roughly 2,600 drug overdose deaths each year in 2011 and 2012, but from 2012 through 2018, the number of drug overdose deaths involving fentanyl and other synthetic opioid increased dramatically each year. More recently, there has been a re-emergence of trafficking, distribution, and abuse of illicitly produced fentanyl and fentanyl analogues with an associated dramatic increase in overdose fatalities, ranging from 2,666 in 2011 to 31,335 in 2018.

Fentanyl is the deadliest drug threat the United States has ever faced, killing nearly 38,000 Americans in the first six months of 2023 alone. Fentanyl and other synthetic drugs, like methamphetamine, are responsible for nearly all of the fatal drug overdoses and poisonings in our country.”²



² US Department of Justice, Drug Enforcement Administration, National Drug Threat Assessment 2024. US Customs and Border Protection, Drug Seizure Statistics Dashboard (October 15, 2024).

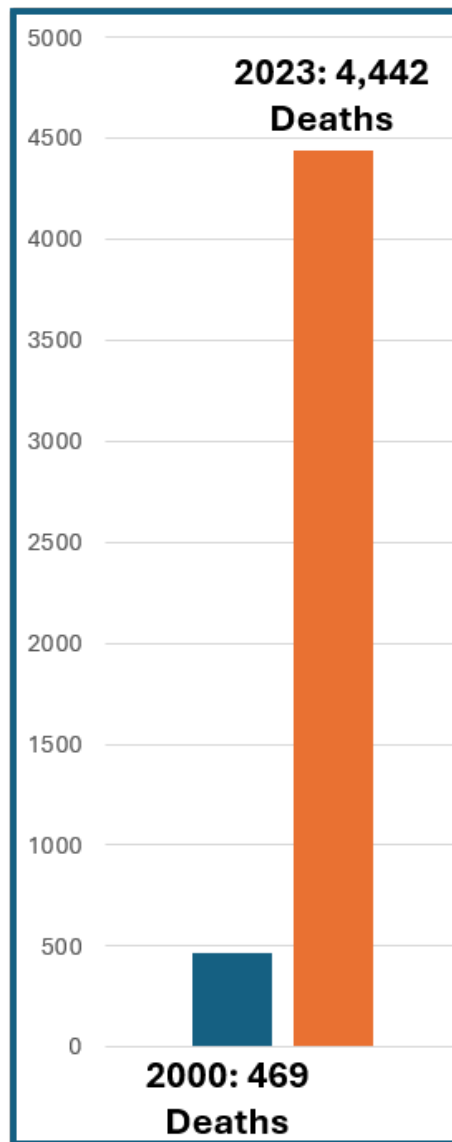


According to the North Carolina Opioid and Substance Use Action Plan Data Dashboard, “nearly 12 North Carolinians died each day from a drug overdose in 2022. From 2000-2022, more than 37,000 North Carolinians lost their lives to drug overdose.”³

³The NC Opioid and Substance Use Action Plan Data Dashboard, <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/about/department-initiatives/overdose-epidemic/opioid-and-substance-use-action-plan-data-dashboard>. (December 10, 2024).

CONTEXT AND THE STATE'S HISTORICAL RESPONSE

Between 2000 and 2023, North Carolina's overdose deaths rose from 469 to 4,442 deaths, increasing nearly ten times over. In this same span of time, the state's population increased by approximately 3 million residents. However, as a point of reference, due to increases in other duties and a variety of competing needs, the SBI functionally has no more drug agent positions today than 25 years ago, before the opioid epidemic began. Overdoses are one of the highest causes of death for Americans, and this threat has dramatically increased for years, therefore, the state's response must be proportionate and correspondingly rise to the level of the danger.



LOCAL DRUG SEIZURES

The North Carolina State Highway Patrol reported the following drug seizure data from 2022-2024. The data from January-February 2025, including US currency and weapons seized, is depicted on the second graph below.

Seized	2022	2023	% Change 2022-2023	2024	% Change 2023-2024
Marijuana	195,529.94	109,597.99	-43.9%	238,542.33	117.7%
Cocaine	40,291.42	45,256.43	12.3%	220,641.50	387.5%
Heroin	563.5	1,088	93.1%	11,844	988.6%
Methamphetamine	87,104	95,458.30	9.6%	9,766.90	-89.8%
Ecstasy	492	6,739	1269.7%	192	-97.2%
Fentanyl	221	13,630	6067.4%	11,959	-12.3%
US Currency	\$3,369,096	\$538,472	-84.0%	\$1,582,714	193.9%
Weapons	26	34	30.8%	24	-29.4%
Total Cases	74	104	40.5%	96	-7.7%

*Drug amounts shown are in grams.

January-February 2025

2025									
Month	Seizure Packets	Marijuana	Cocaine	Heroin	Methamphetamine	Ecstasy	Fentanyl	US Currency	Weapons
January	7	117	12,770	0	0	0	12,366	\$142,350.00	1
February	7	826	5,000	0	0	22	0	\$529,774.00	1
March									
April									
May									
June									
July									
August									
September									
October									
November									
December									
Totals	14	943	17,770	0	0	22	12,366	\$672,124.00	2

*Totals are measured in grams.

During a recent presentation to the North Carolina General Assembly, the North Carolina State Highway Patrol offered the following recommendations:

- Permanently classifying fentanyl analogues as Schedule I drugs

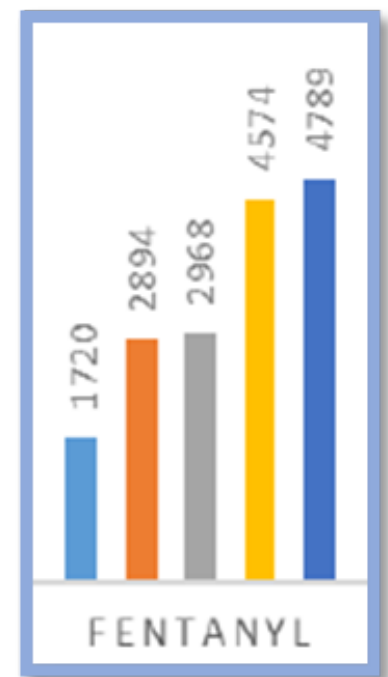
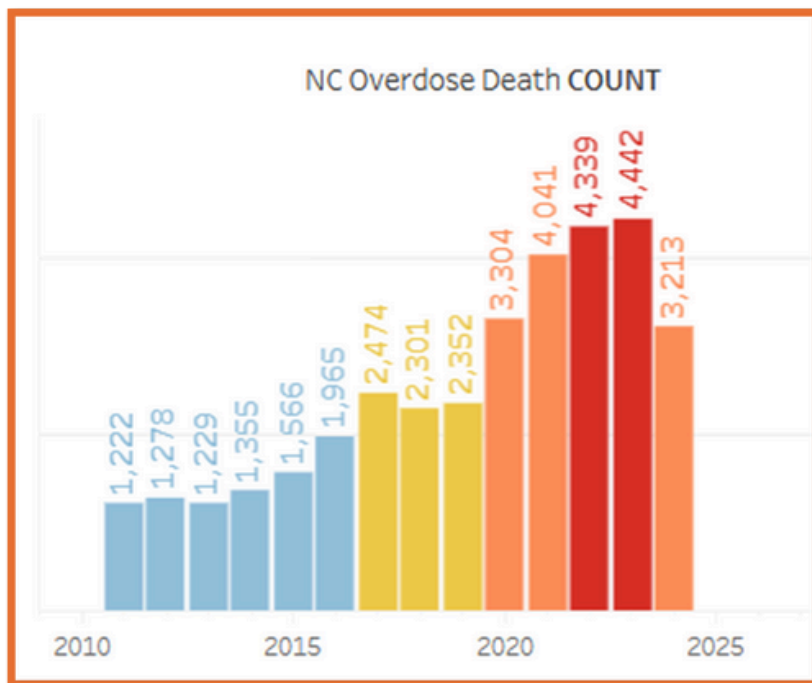
Despite the decades-long proliferation of fentanyl analogues and the obvious problems with the then-current mechanisms for prosecution of fentanyl-analogues traffickers, it was not until 2018 that the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) classified fentanyl analogues as Schedule I drugs, and then on a temporary basis. As the temporary scheduling came to an end, however, Congress failed to take the responsible course and schedule them permanently. Instead, fentanyl analogues' status as Schedule I drugs has become a political plaything in Congress and remains at the mercy of repeated temporary extensions, the most recent of which expired on March 31, 2025. This would ensure that law enforcement can continue to prosecute the sale and use of illicit fentanyl analogues.⁴

- Enhancing efforts by the U.S. government to track the chemicals that can be used to make fentanyl
- Enforcing strict control over precursors of fentanyl-related substances and aggressively pursuing fentanyl-related crimes
- Improved detection technology to combat the challenges of the production and movement of illicit fentanyl
- Consideration of stricter sanctions for fentanyl distribution
- Conducting an assessment of the advantages of Federal versus State prosecution
- Establishing harsher laws for fentanyl than heroin based on frequency that fentanyl is utilized as a cutting agent
- More aggressive enforcement of death by distribution cases by authorization to download victims' phones based on exigency

⁴Miyares, Jason S., Attorney General, Commonwealth of Virginia and Bird, Brenna, Attorney General, State of Iowa. "HALT Fentanyl Act (H.R. 27/S.B 331)." February 12, 2025.

RECENT OVERDOSE DATA AND NALOXONE DEPLOYMENT

Recently, overdoses in North Carolina have shown some signs of limited reduction but remain on track to continue in the thousands per year. While any reduction is positive, just one overdose death is one too many. Consequently, the state must remain steadfast in efforts to curb overdose deaths. State Crime Laboratory fentanyl submissions continue to climb every year, resulting in 1,720 items in FY 2019-2020 and rising to 4,789 by 2023-2024.



While there could be a variety of factors to account for this limited reduction, one is believed to be concerted law enforcement efforts and a second being the prevalence of naloxone, which has substantially increased in availability compared with years past. Between April 2021 and February 1, 2025, HIDTA (the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area – a division of ONDCP) in North Carolina distributed 5340 naloxone kits to 91 different law enforcement agencies. In that span of time, the HIDTA naloxone kits prevented 779 deaths. This represents only a fraction of the law enforcement agencies in North Carolina utilizing naloxone (acquiring deployment data from all of the departments that utilize it is difficult). Consequently, 779 represents lives saved that would not have been, otherwise. Of course, medical responders and even private citizens now have access to naloxone.

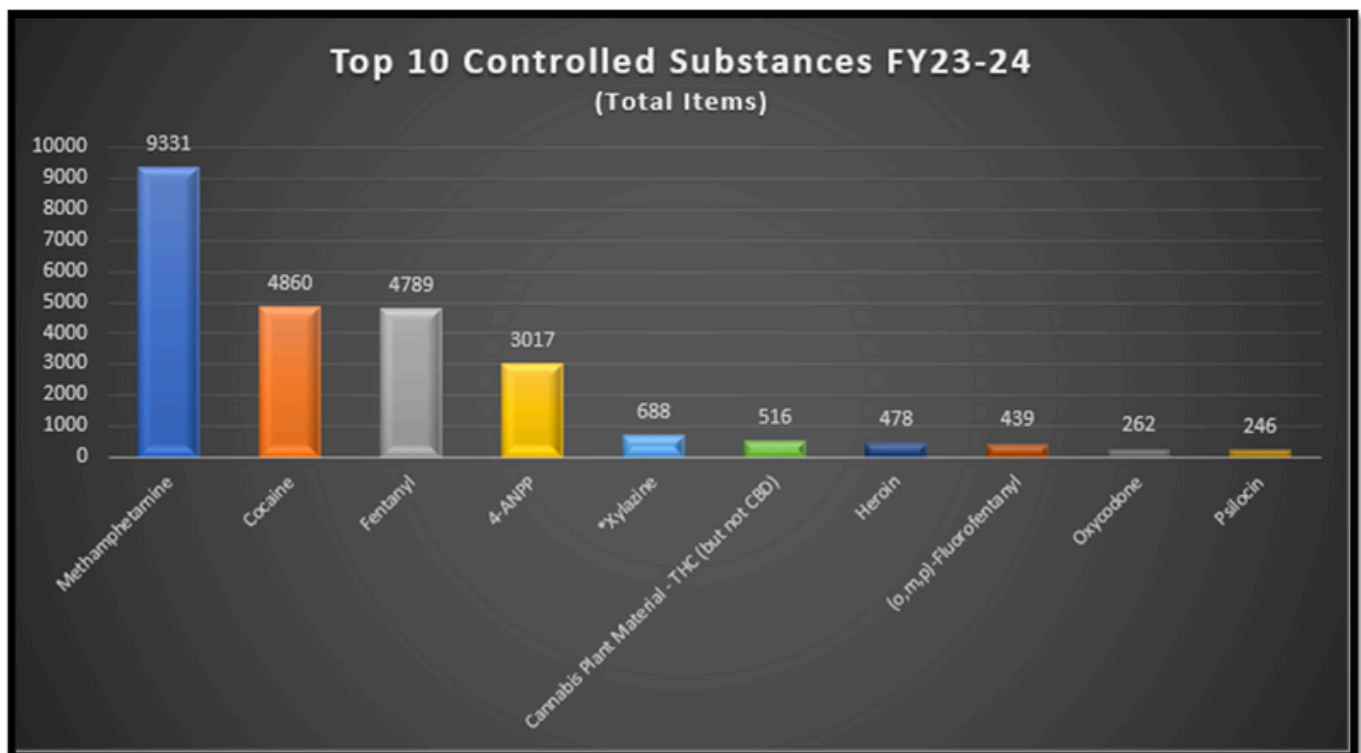
NORTH CAROLINA STATE CRIME LABORATORY (NCSCL) DRUG CHEMISTRY ANALYSIS

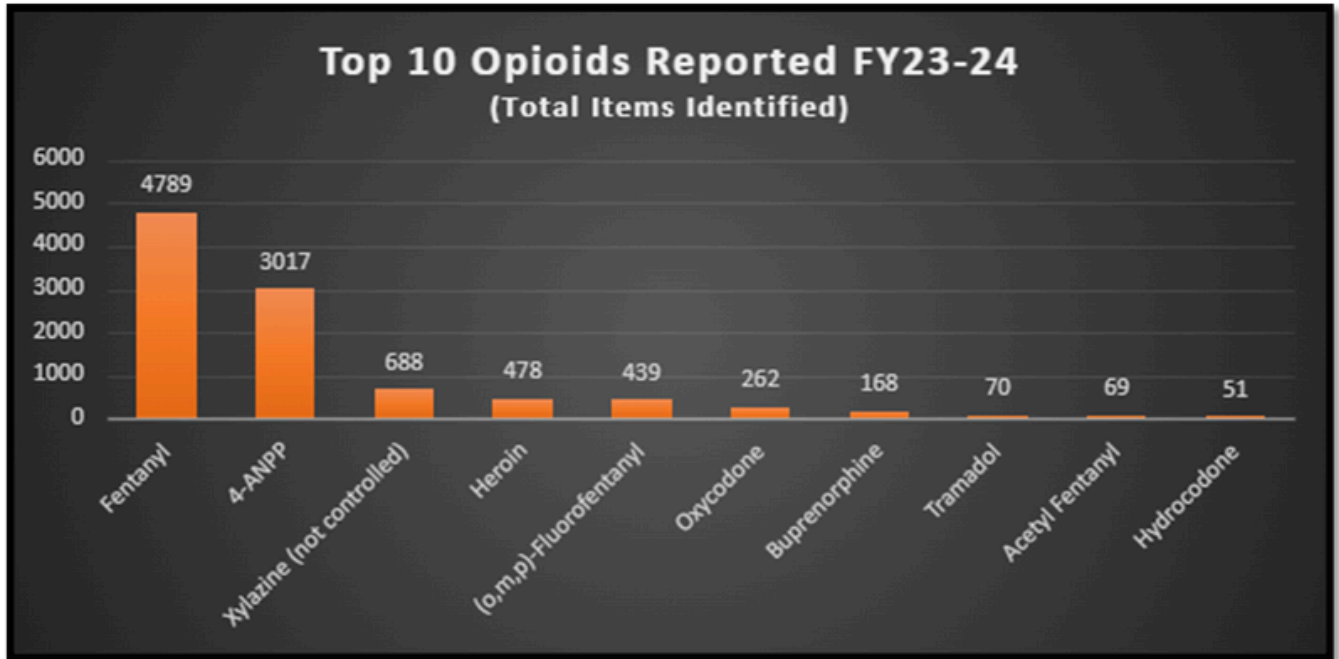
- The NCSCL receives approximately 21,000 cases per year by law enforcement to be analyzed for the presence of controlled substances.
- The average current lead time (from the time of submission to the time a report is issued) for seized drug analysis is 85 days. The Laboratory has reached its targeted goal of less than a 90 day lead time for seized drug analysis, meaning law enforcement agencies receive their analysis and lab report back within 90 days of submission.
- The NCSCL decreased the currently backlog from 12,000 cases (year 2021) to 2,800 cases as of March 2025. A main contributor to the success of decreasing the pending caseload was due to the Drug Chemistry Section being staffed with fewer vacancies during this time.
- In order for the NCSCL to maintain an acceptable lead time for case turnaround, it must remain fully staffed (27 full time scientists).
- The average tenure for a scientist with the NCSCL is 4-5 years. The training program for a drug chemist is nine months and the hiring process is approximately three months. Taking those time frames into consideration, for each scientist that vacates a position, a 1-year deficit in case output is created (estimated to be 800 cases/per position vacated).

The Crime Laboratory collects various data which are reported to the Federal Government for statistical purposes, trend monitoring, and policy making.

- The Drug Chemistry Section continued to see an increase in the complexity of cases submitted. Analysis of these items involves counting and verifying the number of units present, and documenting and analyzing multiple units to meet statutory weight thresholds. Often there is more than one controlled substance present in these samples or varying concentrations of these substances, which requires repeat and/or additional analysis and takes longer for scientists to analyze. Additionally, there has been an increase in the number of clandestine pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical tablets.
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- During FY 23-24 the Drug Chemistry Section of the North Carolina State Crime Laboratory (NCSCL) received 20,951 case records for analysis between July 1, 2023 and June 30, 2024, and in that time completed 26,176 case records.
- Methamphetamine was the most reported controlled substance at approximately 36% of overall case record identifications followed by fentanyl, cocaine, 4-ANPP (a fentanyl precursor chemical), and heroin.
- In January 2023, the NCSCL began tracking cases containing the non-controlled substance xylazine for potential consideration of future scheduling in the NC Controlled Substances Act. In FY 23-24, a total of 688 case records contained xylazine.
- The top ten reported controlled substances can be found in the below chart, as well as the top 10 opioids identified in FY 23-24.
- The NCSCL continues to see a rise in other opioid classes, such as nitazenes and xylazine.





Note: Xylazine is not a controlled substance at the time of this report.

BEST PRACTICES FOR SUPPLY INTERRUPTION

It is essential for law enforcement officers, officials and practitioners in the State of North Carolina to have a greater understanding of the sources and pathways in which fentanyl, heroin and other illicit controlled dangerous substances are making their way into our communities. Identifying the major distribution hubs, primary arterials and principal conveyances illegal drugs are dispersed across the state and the correlations between them provides law enforcement agencies with the crucial intelligence needed to combat drug-trafficking more effectively.

The concentrated potency of synthetic opioids, such as fentanyl, allows for pills and powders to be more easily shipped via parcel delivery, and in greater quantity than ever before. Internet sales allow for relative anonymity of both shippers and receivers of illegal drugs purchased on the “dark web” and other digital platforms. It also removes the dangers associated with face-to-face encounters during illegal drug transactions. Improved and novel ways need to be developed for the interdiction of drug shipments exploiting this means of commerce. Law enforcement task forces that target this often-neglected pathway into our state are needed to mitigate this expanding and open means of importation of illegal narcotics.

As a coastal state, North Carolina also must ensure it does not overlook waterway entries for contraband such as ports and marinas. Identifying the major roadways that are the most frequently used to transport narcotics throughout the state also is essential. Dedicated analysis and identification of these entry and travel ways will assist law enforcement in directing its limited resources to those areas where they can be the most efficient and effective in counter-narcotic interdiction operations.

Also worth considering, is a more robust analysis of law enforcement drug seizures to identify their molecular “signatures” similar to programs in other states. Once this analysis is complete, a database can be compiled to link samples with identical chemical compositions from across North Carolina. In turn, investigators would be able to associate cases and share information, potentially where no other known connection might exist. Encouraging, not only more law enforcement agencies, but also emergency services, medical providers and health and human services departments to participate in the already established US Department of Justice (DOJ) High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) “ODMAP” Program (overdose mapping) also would provide another complementary, real-time, data set to add to the overall drug intelligence modeling. These types of analyses, combined with the assessment of the pathways fentanyl, heroin, and other illegal drugs enter the state, can be successful, overlapping components of a broader strategic initiative to understand the interconnectivity and scope of illicit drug markets more clearly at the statewide level.

RECOMMENDATIONS/RESOURCES NEEDED

The North Carolina General Assembly continues to do its part to combat the proliferation of fentanyl, heroin and other unlawful drugs into the State. The passage of new legislation expanding the scope of death by distribution and enhanced penalties for trafficking fentanyl are important additions to the State’s deterrence and enforcement efforts. However, the analytical proposals outlined above, along with traditional drug investigations and intelligence sharing, will allow for the development of a more complete, statewide intelligence picture of the illicit drug trade within North Carolina. The information gleaned from integrating these evaluative methods will lead to a comprehensive, strategic, statewide, operational plan designed to focus the attention on the most frequent points of entry, means of transport and active criminal organizations in the fentanyl and heroin drug trades.

However, funding is needed to support the additional personnel, technical equipment and investigative manpower needed to produce a truly comprehensive, multi-disciplined, state-based, intelligence strategy to enhance the enforcement of General Statutes targeting fentanyl, heroin and other illicit drugs.

In researching areas of needs and responses to help curb overdoses in the state, this Task Force presents the following:

1. Statewide Suggestions

A. Make the License Plate Reader Pilot Program Permanent in 2026

Session Bill 2023-151 established a “Pilot Program to Authorize Automatic License Plate Readers in State Rights-of-Way.” The State Bureau of Investigation (SBI) was designated as the coordinating agency to work with the NC Department of Transportation (NC DOT) on the installation of ALPR equipment in these areas. This legislation was updated in July 2024 with the passage of Session Law 2024-43.

While this Pilot Program will not conclude until 2026, license plate reader capabilities have already been proven across the country as an extremely beneficial tool for all types of high-level crimes, especially drug investigations.

Success Story Example:

- North Carolina law enforcement officers are aware of countless examples throughout the nation of LPRs playing a critical role in the separate seizures of numerous large shipments of controlled substances; seizures that would have otherwise not occurred without LPR technology. In one instance alone, thousands of dosage units of carfentanil were seized based upon LPR data, thereby saving countless lives. Carfentanil is a synthetic opioid approximately 10,000 times more potent than morphine and 100 times more potent than fentanyl.
- While unrelated to overdoses, this tool has substantial positive impacts for many other aspects of public safety as well to include kidnappings, Silver Alerts, human trafficking cases, fleeing homicide fugitives, terrorism, etc.

B. Education for North Carolina Students

There is a critical need to implement standardized, age-appropriate overdose awareness education for North Carolina students. Far too many young people are unaware of the dangers posed by fentanyl and other synthetic opioids—particularly the risk associated with counterfeit pills that are disguised to look like legitimate prescription medications but may be illicitly manufactured and laced with deadly substances.

At present, there is no uniform, statewide overdose prevention curriculum in North Carolina’s public school system. This lack of standardized education leaves students vulnerable to misinformation and unprepared to make informed decisions regarding drug use and peer influence.

We recommend the development and implementation of an annual, evidence-based drug awareness and overdose prevention program for all middle and high school students. This curriculum should be delivered in partnership with public health professionals, educators, and law enforcement, and should include:

- Clear, factual information about the risks of fentanyl and other synthetic opioids;
- Real-life testimonials or case studies to personalize the consequences of experimentation;
- Instruction on recognizing the signs of overdose and how to respond;
- Resources for students seeking help for themselves or others.

Uniform implementation across school districts will ensure that all North Carolina students—regardless of geographic location—receive consistent and potentially life-saving information. Equipping students with knowledge is one of the most powerful tools we have to combat the fentanyl crisis from the ground up.

C. Fentanyl-related bonds

Include fentanyl related offenses under the Pretrial Integrity Act, which will require a judge to set bond and other terms of pretrial release.

2. State Bureau of Investigation

As noted previously, the SBI, as the state's primary state-level drug investigative agency, has not seen a corresponding increase in drug resources to proportionately match the rapidly rising threat to North Carolina. As overdose deaths increased by the thousands between 2000 and 2023, and as the state's population increased by approximately 3 million citizens in the same general timeframe, the SBI has not seen an equivalent increase in drug agent positions.

Further, there is a strong correlation between drugs and a myriad of other crimes. For example, most homicide investigators report that the majority of murder cases are in some way drug-related. Consequently, an appropriate response to rising drug crimes will very likely aid in the solving, if not prevention, of other crimes like murders. Therefore, the agency needs additional resources to appropriately address the danger to the public. Requests include:

A. Twenty-two (22) Drug Agent Positions

The agency needs a substantial increase in drug agent positions. Staffing levels are substantially insufficient to meet the needs of the state and to adequately counter the current threat to North Carolinians.

B. Funding for a pilot program to establish a joint drug task force of local law enforcement agencies and the SBI

a. A funded task force would enable information sharing and pooling of resources between multiple agencies, toward the public good.

b. Expenses covered may include overtime, funds for the controlled purchase of drugs, equipment, etc.

C. Increased budget for investigatory expenses

a. Translation funding

The majority of controlled substances seized in North Carolina ultimately originate in other countries, therefore, foreign languages are regularly encountered, and these foreign languages become barriers to advance investigations. The SBI has no dedicated funding mechanism to engage this problem.

b. Surveillance expenses

The SBI often supports local agencies with electronic surveillances and covers these expenses for them, in addition to the SBI's own cases. These include, for example, expenses occurred when obtaining certain types of records and electronic data from cellular telephone providers. These expenses are substantial and at present, funding is insufficient.

Recommendation for Prosecutorial Assistance and Resources to Combat the Influx of Fentanyl, Heroin, and Other Unlawful Drugs into North Carolina

3. The North Carolina Conference of District Attorneys

The North Carolina Conference of District Attorneys (Conference) is comprised of the 42 elected District Attorneys, who serve in their respective prosecutorial districts. Established under N.C. Gen. Stat. § 7A-411, the Conference provides critical support, training, and resources to prosecutors across the state to ensure the effective and fair administration of justice. With staff based in Raleigh and throughout North Carolina, the Conference assists prosecutors in developing legal strategies, improving case management, and addressing emerging criminal trends, such as the devastating impact of fentanyl and other illicit drugs.

The specialized resource prosecutors at the Conference of District Attorneys provide critical expertise and support in complex areas of prosecution, ensuring consistency, efficiency, and effectiveness across the state. These subject-matter experts offer direct case assistance, training, and legal guidance to prosecutors handling intricate legal matters, including impaired driving and vehicular homicide, financial crimes, homicide, arson, juvenile crime, child abuse, domestic violence and emerging threats like human trafficking. Their proactive engagement enhances prosecutorial capabilities, fosters collaboration with law enforcement, and strengthens the pursuit of justice. By equipping prosecutors with specialized knowledge and resources, these resource prosecutors play a vital role in improving case outcomes and upholding the integrity of the criminal justice system.

The Need for Enhanced Prosecutorial Assistance and Resources

The opioid epidemic, particularly the rise of fentanyl, has placed an unprecedented burden on North Carolina's criminal justice system. The rapid proliferation of fentanyl and heroin-related offenses and deaths demands a coordinated prosecutorial response that includes specialized training, specialized prosecutors, and enhanced collaboration with law enforcement and public health agencies. To effectively combat this crisis, enhance our ability to combat drug related offenses and support prosecution, North Carolina prosecutors require additional resources and support in the following areas:

Controlled Substances Prosecution Initiative (CSPI)

A. Two (2) Drug Resource Prosecutors and a Legal Assistant/Project Coordinator

Resource Prosecutors are subject matter experts who provide direct support to District Attorneys, Assistant District Attorneys, law enforcement agencies, and other allied professionals. Their role is to enhance prosecution efforts by offering specialized legal expertise, training, and assistance in handling complex cases. The Conference of District Attorneys has a proven record in providing support and assistance to prosecutors and their teams.

B. Drug Resource Prosecutors

- **Trial Assistance & Case Consultation:** Provide hands-on support in high-profile or complex drug prosecutions and Death by Distribution, assisting with case strategy, motions, and trial preparation. Serve as a special prosecutor when requested by the local District Attorney.
 - **Legal Research & Updates:** Monitor changes in drug related laws and ensure prosecutors, law enforcement and allied professionals have the latest legal tools and strategies.
 - **Enhanced Training and Continuing Legal Education:** Conduct comprehensive training sessions for prosecutors, law enforcement, and other allied professionals on best practices in drug enforcement and prosecution, emerging drug trends, forensic evidence, overdose homicide prosecutions, and effective sentencing strategies are essential. Funding should be allocated for annual training sessions
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to equip prosecutors with the latest tools and techniques for combating drug-related crimes.

- **Interagency Collaboration, Intelligence Sharing, and Multi-Jurisdictional Coordination:** Facilitate collaboration among different agencies to improve case outcomes and ensure uniform enforcement strategies across jurisdictions. Strengthening partnerships between prosecutors, law enforcement agencies, forensic labs, medical examiners, and public health officials will enhance information sharing and coordination.
- **Community Outreach and Prevention Initiatives:** Prosecutors play a crucial role in public education efforts to raise awareness about the dangers of fentanyl and other opioids. Additional resources for outreach programs, including school presentations and community engagement initiatives, will complement enforcement efforts by focusing on prevention.

C. Legal Assistant/Project Coordinator

The Legal Assistant/Project Coordinator will play a vital role in supporting the specialized drug prosecution team by providing both legal and administrative assistance in complex controlled substance cases. This position will assist in special prosecutions, including Death by Distribution homicide cases, by facilitating communication with law enforcement, victims, and victims' families to ensure compliance with legal and ethical victims' rights obligations. The coordinator will also manage logistical planning for multidisciplinary training programs, ensuring seamless execution of courses focused on investigating and prosecuting controlled substance offenses, particularly those involving fentanyl and heroin. Through this work, the Legal Assistant/Project Coordinator will enhance the effectiveness of drug prosecutions and contribute to a more comprehensive and victim-centered approach to justice.

Conclusion

The fight against fentanyl, heroin, and other unlawful drugs requires a multifaceted approach that includes strong prosecutorial leadership, enhanced resources, and strategic collaboration. By investing in the Controlled Substances Prosecution Initiative (CSPI) and dedicated drug resource prosecutors you will expand legal and investigative support, provide advanced training, leveraging data-driven strategies, fostering interagency cooperation, and supporting prevention efforts. North Carolina

can take meaningful steps toward curbing the devastating impact of illicit drugs on our communities. The North Carolina Conference of District Attorneys stands ready to lead these efforts and this Task Force urges the allocation of necessary resources to empower prosecutors and multi-disciplinary teams in this critical mission.

4. North Carolina State Highway Patrol

The North Carolina State Highway Patrol's Criminal Interdiction Unit is a specialized unit with unique training in the detection of criminal and terrorist activity at strategic locations throughout the State, with a concentration of enforcement efforts within the main corridors of the State. This unit was created to complement and enhance the overall mission of the Highway Patrol while working in a coordinated effort with all levels of government to reduce terrorism and criminal activity. This mission will be accomplished through the aggressive detection, apprehension and prosecution of persons involved in the use, transportation and trafficking of controlled substances, and other criminal activities on North Carolina highways.

A. Expansion of the SHP's Criminal Interdiction Unit; increase allotment of members on this unit. Currently there are three (3) teams throughout North Carolina: Asheville, Winston-Salem and Benson. These teams are broken down into six (6) member teams that handle a large geographic area. For example, the Criminal Interdiction Unit in Asheville is responsible for Western North Carolina, from the Tennessee / North Carolina State Line to the I-77 corridor. The Criminal Interdiction Unit in Winston-Salem is responsible for Central North Carolina, from the I-77 corridor to Hillsborough, North Carolina. The Criminal Interdiction Unit in Benson is responsible for Eastern North Carolina, from Hillsborough to the Eastern Coast of North Carolina. An expansion in this team would be a force-multiplier to combat not only criminality, but the influx of fentanyl and other harmful controlled substances that travel through North Carolina.

B. Additional canines for drug detection are needed to replace the current aging canine fleet. Increase the allotment of canines to adequately staff each district.

C. Create a canine coordinator position with responsibilities dedicated only to the canine unit, training, and certification.

D. Build a canine training facility/complex with scent walls, lockers, vehicles, grooming stations, and other needed amenities. There are many examples across the United States which could be used as models.

E. Other equipment needs that would aid in the investigation and apprehension of the criminal element include Portable Finger-print ID scanners to determine the identity of individuals. To combat financial crimes, ERAD (Electronic Recovery and Access to Data) is a cloud-based technology company specializing in investigative tools that help law enforcement close more cases. ERAD can assist law enforcement with identifying persons of interest, check prepaid & gift card balances, identifying stolen & counterfeit cards, digital currency tracking, etc. A new tactic utilized by criminal groups is to steal identification from immigrants then secure false driver's license at various driver license facilities in multiple states. Investigative Databases for roadside investigations. Marinus Analytics has developed - MPWatch & Traffic Jam, missing person's watch (MPWatch), tool for finding trafficked victims. This system has a robust monitoring scanning system, targeted detection, top-tier accuracy, law enforcement support, seamless identification, and customizable searches. This program would enhance our Missing Person's Unit and IPC (Interdiction for the Protection of Children), high-risk threats to children. Additionally, the overall, protection of our members is vital to the protection of the citizens that we are sworn to protect. The threat of ambushes by trail vehicles, escorting loaded vehicles that are trafficking contraband is no longer a remote possibility, this is reality now our Troopers face. The addition of ballistic glass in law enforcement vehicles and ballistic vehicle armoring will provide protection for our members. Invest in more Thermo Fisher Scientific TruNarc narcotics analyzers. LPR (License Plate Reader) technology in strategic locations throughout North Carolina. Data analysts document traffic stop information, and trends would allow our members to increase their productivity in enforcement efforts to combat criminality. These analysts would also assist in the Patrol's human trafficking efforts.

5. North Carolina State Crime Laboratory

Funding for an experienced-based salary progression schedule is needed to recruit and retain highly qualified scientists. Retaining experienced scientists is critical to reducing the backlog of the increasing number of submissions to the lab.

FINAL REPORT OF RESEARCH, FINDINGS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As indicated in the Scope of Project of the Interim Report submitted by this Task Force in June 2024, this final report is a comprehensive synopsis of analytics to include law enforcement encounters/seizures, prevalence and overdose statistics, and responses to prevention/education, treatment and prosecution. This report highlights current best practices to interrupt the supply by identifying precursors, trends and tactics, and enforcement measures. It includes a review of current and relevant state laws and identifies the needed resources to aid the State of North Carolina's public safety, legislative, judicial, and public health officials in the means of enforcing fentanyl and heroin drug violations.

Respectfully submitted,

Sheriff Charles Blackwood, Task Force Chairman, North Carolina Sheriffs' Association
Special Agent-in-Charge Brian Fleming, North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation
Deputy Secretary Sherry Hunter, North Carolina Department of Public Safety
Colonel Freddy Johnson, Jr., North Carolina State Highway Patrol
Chief Paul Liquorie, North Carolina Association of Chiefs of Police
Executive Director Kimberly Spahos, North Carolina Conference of District Attorneys

APPENDIX A

REVIEW OF CURRENT AND RELEVANT NORTH CAROLINA LAWS

Fentanyl Statutes Index

The list below represents a compilation of all the areas where North Carolina has statutes that may relate to fentanyl, to identify where constructive changes are needed to tackle this problem. Surprisingly, the specific word “fentanyl” only appears to be mentioned in three places in our General Statutes. A few other statutes have been identified for consideration in Section D.

A. G.S. 90-90: Schedule II Controlled Substances:

Under subsection (2), “the following opiates or opioids, including their isomers, esters, ethers, salts, and salts of isomers,” are all deemed to be a Schedule II controlled substance unless they are specifically listed or exempted elsewhere. The list of covered drugs in this statute includes fentanyl, its immediate precursor chemical ANPP (4-anilino-N-phenethyl-4-piperidine), and Norfentanyl.

B. G.S. 90-89: Schedule I Controlled Substances:

Although fentanyl itself is a Schedule II drug as noted above, several variants and analogs of fentanyl are specifically listed as Schedule I opiates/opioids under subsection (1) of this statute. The particular drugs listed under this statute are Acetyl-alpha-methylfentanyl, Alpha-methylthiofentanyl, Alpha-methylfentanyl, Beta-hydroxfentanyl, Beta-hydroxy-3-methylfentanyl, 3-Methylfentanyl, 3-Methylthiofentanyl, Para-fluorofentanyl, Thiofentanyl, and Acetyl Fentanyl.

Additionally, “fentanyl derivatives” are included as Schedule I opiates/opioids under subsection (1a). This means any drugs that are “structurally derived” from fentanyl (N-[1-(2-phenylethyl)-4-piperidinyl]-N-phenylpropanamide), and the list of those drugs specifically includes, but is not limited to, Furanyl Fentanyl, Butyryl Fentanyl, Beta-Hydroxythiofentanyl, Valeryl Fentanyl, 2-fluorofentanyl, 3-fluorofentanyl, tetrahydrofuran fentanyl, 4-fluoroisobutyryl fentanyl, and 4-fluorobutyryl fentanyl.

C. G.S. 90-95: Violations; Penalties:

This statute sets out the penalties for unlawful possession, sale, manufacture, distribution, etc., of controlled substances. Simple possession of fentanyl is a Class I felony, pursuant to G.S. 90-95(d)(2). The penalties for trafficking in fentanyl (as well as heroin or carfentanil) are set out in G.S. 90-95(h)(4), subsections a. through c.

D. Other Criminal Statutes That Could Also Be Implicated:

Numerous other existing North Carolina criminal statutes related to “drugs” could also be affected by any changes that involve fentanyl or its derivatives/analogues, even if these statutes don’t mention that drug specifically, because these statutes make reference to Schedule I, Schedule II, or even just “controlled substances” more broadly. The following have been identified:

G.S. 14-18.4 – Death by distribution of certain controlled substances

G.S. 15A-145.2 – Expunction for certain drug offenses

G.S. 19-6.1 – Forfeiture of real property based on nuisance/prior offenses involving Schedule I/II drug

G.S. 20-138.1 – DWI based on any amount of Schedule I drug in blood/urine

G.S. 20-138.2 – DWI in commercial vehicle, based on any Schedule I drug in blood/urine

G.S. 90-87(5a) – Defining “analogues” of Schedule I/II controlled substances (see also subsection (6), dealing with counterfeit controlled substances)

G.S. 90-89.1 – Analogues treated/punished as Schedule I drug

G.S. 90-95 – This statute is cited above re: PWISD or trafficking of fentanyl specifically, but this statute also encompasses several offenses addressing particular types of manufacture, possession, sale or distribution offenses for Schedule I/II drugs, such as sales to a minor under a certain age or within 1000 feet of a school or park.

G.S. 90-95.1 – Continuing criminal enterprise

G.S. 90-95.4 to 95.7 – Drug sale/activity involving a minor

G.S. 90-96 – Conditional discharge for first offense

G.S. 90-96.1 – Immunity for minors if they disclose source of drugs

G.S. 90-96.2 – Drug overdose treatment limited immunity

G.S. 90-106 – Dispensing/labeling Schedule II drugs

G.S. 90-108 – Unlawful distribution of Schedule I/II drugs without prescription, using fictitious prescriber number, obtaining by fraud/forgery, etc. (see also subsection (7), maintaining a vehicle/dwelling for controlled substance purposes)

G.S. 90-113.27 – Limited immunity for needle exchange programs

The list above does not attempt to cite every single criminal statute that makes any reference to “controlled substances” in general (e.g., assessing costs for lab testing fees, performing drug testing on probationers, or imposing prohibitions against doing certain acts while under the influence of a controlled substance such as carrying a concealed weapon). Such a list would be exhaustive and would be indistinguishable from statutes for cocaine or various other drugs. Nor does this list include numerous other statutes that mention Schedule I/II but fall outside the criminal realm and deal more with issues like medical licensing, prescription drug manufacturers, and so on. However, the DOJ has taken some actions in these other areas that may require additional familiarization – such as limiting the size of any initial “opioid” prescription given to a patient: <https://ncdoj.gov/responding-to-crime/opioid-epidemic/>.
