

Testimony of Mr. Brandon Dunn
Co-founder of the Forever15Project
House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary
The Biden Border Crisis: Part I

Good morning members of the committee. As mentioned, I am the co-founder of the Forever 15 Project. The Forever 15 Project is a non-profit organization founded by my wife, Janel, and me in honor of our son, Noah Rodriguez. Our mission is to spread awareness of the growing fentanyl epidemic through print media, billboards, speaking events, and any other means available to spread our message.

On August 21, 2022 Noah died as a result of fentanyl poisoning. He was 15 years old and a Sophomore at Johnson High School. He was murdered by a drug dealer selling counterfeit Percocet pills. The pill Noah took contained over 8 mg of fentanyl. 2 mg is a lethal dose. There were no other drugs in the pill except fentanyl. Noah was not a drug addict. Noah was not a bad kid. Noah was an honor roll student. An athlete. A good friend, and a great kid. Noah did not come from the “wrong side of town.” He came from a good Christian home and has caring and loving parents. He was considering a career in the United States Navy, and wanted to become an underwater welder. He left behind those parents, a now 5 year old sister, a 2 year old sister, and a 6 month old baby brother.

Despite all these good things, he still became a victim of the growing fentanyl crisis. I could sit here and quote all the facts and figures that we have learned by attending DEA presentations, but all of you here know those numbers. Here are some facts and figures most do not know. Between the dates of 7/7/22 and 8/21/22, Hays CISD lost 3 children to fentanyl poisoning. Garrett Garcia age 15 who passed on 7/7/22. Kevin McConville, age 17 who passed on 8/2/22. And Noah Rodriguez, age 15 who passed on 8/21/22. These are just 3 of the children in Hays county that have died this past year. Sadly, we have met many other families across the state of Texas who have lost children as well. Most of these children are under the age of 18 with some of them being 13 and 14 years old. There have also been countless numbers of poisonings in our county that have fortunately not ended in death. Despite our best efforts, our billboards, fliers, news articles and television news stories, public speaking, etc. we continue to lose this fight against fentanyl. This year alone we have had 6 poisonings and 1 fatal poisoning in Hays county. This is a killer that does not discriminate. It kills young and old alike. It gives no regard to race, creed, color, religion, financial or social standing.

Why are we losing this fight? Part of the problem is people are not aware of the dangers of fentanyl. They think it cannot or will not happen to them. However, the majority of the problem is illicit fentanyl is here and available in massive quantities. The DEA knows how it is happening. The DEA knows where it is coming from. However the problem is that despite their efforts, the United States government has simply not gone far enough in policing and shutting down the main route of this product into the country. That is via the southern border. As our non-profits mission is primarily focused on awareness, this is not a topic that is usually addressed by us in our public speaking, interviews, or other media. However it is the “elephant in the room” that no one wants to address. Usually because it ends in heated political discussion. This is not a political issue. It is about life and death. It is also about common

sense. Record amounts of fentanyl are being seized at the southern border year over year over year. Most of these seizures are made at Ports of Entry into the United States. How many are missed? How many pounds of fentanyl are coming across the thousands of miles of sparsely policed or monitored southern border? I was born and raised in Texas. I have been to the border. You can go to Boquillas Canyon in Big Bend National Park and pay a man in a boat \$5 to row you from one side of the Rio Grande to the other. You could bring back whatever you wanted. Maybe you would get stopped by park rangers. Probably not. The nearest checkpoints are hours north on the major roads out of the park. That's great if the smugglers are in cars. Odds are they are going to do everything possible to not go through these. This is just one hundreds, or even thousands of areas where fentanyl may be transported into the country.

We are calling on the United States Government to take decisive action on this epidemic. We need more funding and resources for prevention and awareness. We need more funding and resources at our southern border. We need to deter and prevent these cartels from smuggling their product into the country as well as stiffer penalties for those caught doing so. We need to take significant steps to reduce the uncontrolled flow of people across our southern border. This is not a fight about immigration. It is a fight for the lives of not only our youth, but for all of the citizens of the United States of America.