

OPINION

“Publish and set up a standard; publish and conceal not.”
Jeremiah 50:2

New path to justice on fentanyl fatalities

Every district attorney in Oklahoma has sat across from a parent who is still hoping the medical examiner got something wrong. They tell you about a son who was doing better or a daughter who had just gotten her job back before asking the question I hear more than any



JACK THORP

other: Who sold the drug that killed my child?

Too often, Oklahoma prosecutors were forced to give an answer no family should have to accept. We frequently knew who was responsible,

but we could rarely prove it to the standard a courtroom demands.

In 2023, my office set out to change that. We believed an overdose death deserved to be investigated as a potential homicide from the moment first responders arrived, not after the evidence had disappeared. That became the foundation of the overdose response model we built throughout District 27 (serving Adair, Cherokee, Sequoyah and Wagoner counties) and the model that House Bill 2941 now expands statewide.

We implemented a coordinated response with police departments, sheriff’s offices, fire departments, EMS, school administrators, our Drug Task Force, the OSBI and medical partners. That approach has produced encouraging results: District 27 recorded 50 overdose deaths in 2023, falling to 31 in 2024 and to 15 in 2025. Aggressive prevention, treatment, public education and immediate criminal investigation have all played vital roles.

Historically, by the time overdose deaths reached a prosecutor, the scene was gone. Paramedics had left, families had cleaned the room, phones with text evidence were unsecured and witnesses had dispersed.

Oklahoma law has allowed prosecutors to charge first-degree murder when a person distributes a dangerous controlled substance causing death. The challenge has been proving causation beyond a reasonable doubt when a medical examiner reports fentanyl alongside other substances.

House Bill 2941 makes District 27’s model the standard across Oklahoma. It requires first responders to notify law enforcement immediately so investigators can secure evidence, preserve electronic communications and identify witnesses while the scene is fresh. HB 2941 creates a rebuttable presumption regarding causation when fentanyl is present, resolving a legal bottleneck while preserving a defendant’s constitutional rights.

The legislation passed with bipartisan support — 87 to 2 in the House and 46 to 0 in the Senate — and takes effect Nov. 1.

Charging decisions will always remain the responsibility of Oklahoma’s elected district attorneys. The trafficker who profits by selling counterfeit pills or fatal fentanyl should answer to a jury. The person whose addiction has overtaken life, however, deserves the opportunity to recover through treatment court, where structure and judicial supervision provide a path back to health.

Please lock up prescription medications in your home, properly dispose of unused drugs and talk to your children about the dangers of counterfeit pills. It takes only a tiny amount of fentanyl to end a life in minutes.

If someone you love is struggling, seek help. Treatment works. Recovery is possible. And I would much rather see someone enter treatment than have to face the next family sitting across my desk asking who sold the drug that killed their child.

Jack Thorp is district attorney of Oklahoma District 27, which is Adair, Cherokee, Sequoyah and Wagoner counties.



MIKE SIMONS, TULSA WORLD ARCHIVE

In April 2022, advocates planted 2,624 pinwheels outside The Parent and Child Center of Tulsa, each representing a substantiated case of child abuse or neglect.

State’s child abuse victims need support from Congress

Funding for services across Oklahoma is rapidly decreasing

Children in Oklahoma are nearly twice as likely as the average American child to become victims of abuse or neglect.



CARRIE LITTLE

In 2024 alone, more than 13,000 Oklahoma children were confirmed victims.

These children and their families depend on specialized help — from medical care and mental health counseling to victim advocacy and legal support — to overcome their trauma and bring abusers to justice.

Yet funding for these services across Oklahoma is rapidly decreasing. Unless Congress intervenes soon, our state could lose its ability to provide the care our children need.

The foundation of child abuse care in Oklahoma is the network of 21 Children’s Advocacy Centers across our state. These centers bring together multidisciplinary teams of law enforcement, prosecutors,

child-protection officials, medical professionals, mental health providers, victim advocates and specially trained forensic interviewers to investigate abuse while helping children heal. Last year, they collectively served more than 51,000 Oklahoma children.

Children’s Advocacy Centers are critical to handling the challenges of investigating child abuse. Young children often struggle to understand or describe what has happened to them, yet their accounts are essential to prosecuting abusers. The centers’ specialized forensic interviewers are trained to gather accurate information and secure reliable testimony for law enforcement and prosecutors without re-traumatizing victims when a crime is alleged.

The centers also offer other resources that children and their families often need. They staff victim advocates who can guide families through the criminal justice process. They also employ medical and mental health professionals who can provide care and therapy for victims.

Children’s Advocacy Centers receive much of their funding from the federal Crime Victims Fund, which is financed through

finances and penalties paid by federal criminal offenders. But years of historically low deposits have depleted the Crime Victims Fund, forcing centers to stretch resources across more children precisely when many of our communities are seeing increasing need.

The strain is especially severe in rural Oklahoma, where many Children’s Advocacy Centers serve multiple counties yet operate with only a handful of employees. Many centers have gone from two forensic interviewers to one. Others have cut victim advocates or struggled to preserve mental health services. Some are serving up to 30% more children year over year, even as staffing has declined.

This understaffing forces children to wait longer for the care they need to heal from trauma. It drives burnout among employees, which can further increase wait times, deprives centers of invaluable experience, and forces local law enforcement officers to take on responsibilities they aren’t trained to perform.

A lack of trained forensic interviewers can delay investigations, giving perpetrators an opportunity to intimidate or manipulate victims and

potentially evade accountability.

Fortunately, Congress has a straightforward way to help.

In January, the House of Representatives unanimously passed the bipartisan Crime Victims Fund Stabilization Act, which would replenish the Crime Victims Fund with money recovered from people and companies that have defrauded federal programs. Without raising taxes or creating any new programs, the legislation would strengthen services for victims of child abuse and provide more consistent funding from year to year.

The bill has broad bipartisan support in the Senate, but until it becomes law, Oklahoma’s Children’s Advocacy Centers will remain in financial jeopardy. That’s why the Senate should help move the Crime Victims Fund Stabilization Act across the finish line as quickly as possible.

By helping pass the Crime Victims Fund Stabilization Act, our state’s congressional leaders can strengthen this support network to ensure no child is denied the justice they deserve.

Carrie Little is the executive director of Children’s Advocacy Centers of Oklahoma.

Oklahoma needs a durable fertilizer exemption

Oklahoma’s biggest trade risk hasn’t happened yet: 20 miles northeast of downtown Tulsa, the Verdigris nitrogen complex turns Oklahoma natural gas into fertilizer. It is the second largest producer of liquid nitrogen fertilizer in North America. What Oklahoma does not have, and has never had, is a single pound of potash, a fertilizer ingredient that U.S. farmers depend on.



JAYASH PAUDEL

We import all of it. The United States buys 92% of the potash it uses from abroad, and roughly four-fifths of that comes from Canada.

That matters more than usual this month. Trade talks between Washington and Ottawa collapsed in late August, and none have been scheduled since. Canada’s retaliatory tariffs on 27.6 billion Canadian dollars of American goods took effect Sept. 8. At the end of this month, American import bans

on certain Canadian alcohol, dairy products and motorcycles will begin.

Here is what most of the coverage has missed: None of it touches fertilizer. Potash has been carved out of every round, starting from the emergency tariffs the Supreme Court struck down in February to the Section 301 duties in July and the 50% tariffs imposed in August. Energy was carved out, too. Oklahoma’s exposures to Canada are the \$6.2 billion in crude oil that feeds our refineries, and the potash our farmers cannot buy anywhere else.

Oklahoma, so far, has been lucky, and it is worth being precise about why. Not because of a treaty, and not because of a law. Because of a presidential exemption that can be withdrawn by proclamation, without notice, without public comment, on any given morning.

The president said in December that if necessary, the United States would put “very severe tariffs” on Canadian fertilizer. Canada’s premiers are now arguing openly about whether to

restrict potash exports as leverage. Ontario’s premier wants to. Saskatchewan’s, who has the mines, does not.

If that carve-out goes, Oklahoma has no substitute. Fertilizer already accounts for \$74 of the \$257 it costs to farm an acre of dryland wheat in this state, which amounts to 29 cents of every operating dollar.

I study fertilizer markets, and the reason this matters is that fertilizer is not a marginal line item. This input moves everything else. In work published last year, I found that a 10% increase in fertilizer use raises cereal yields by more than 3%. Run that backward: A sustained rise in the price of potash does not simply raise what it costs to farm here. It lowers what Oklahoma’s ground produces.

And Oklahoma cannot substitute its way out. We make nitrogen here, from our own gas, at Verdigris and Enid. We make no potash, and there is no deposit to open. One signature would raise the price of an input that every wheat and canola acre in this state depends on, with no

hearing, no comment period, and no domestic supply to fall back on.

Note that Oklahoma’s wheat crop fell 52% this year, to 48.9 million bushels. This was precisely because of drought, and not because of any trade policy.

But the drought is exactly why the input question matters now. Farmers absorbing a halved crop have no margin left for a fertilizer shock they did not choose and cannot hedge.

Oklahoma’s congressional delegation has something specific to ask for, and it is not a subsidy. Make the fertilizer exemption durable — written into statute, or into whatever replaces the current arrangement with Canada — rather than leaving it to the stroke of a pen. An exemption that can vanish overnight is not protection. It is a reprieve.

Jayash Paudel is an associate professor of economics at the University of Oklahoma and a co-director at the Center for Peace and Development.