

## United States Senate

September 12, 2024

Dear Superintendent,

As we embark on another school year, I want to extend my heartfelt thanks for your unwavering dedication to the education and well-being of Florida's children. Your leadership is crucial in shaping the future of our state and nation, and your efforts often go unrecognized despite their profound impact.

Schools today face challenges that extend beyond academics, and I know how vital it is to safeguard the well-being of the students in our care. One of the most pressing issues we face is the ongoing fentanyl crisis. This devastating epidemic continues to claim lives at an alarming rate, and its impact is felt deeply in our communities. In 2023, over 107,000 Americans lost their lives to drug overdoses, with fentanyl being the leading cause of death among individuals aged 18 to 49.<sup>1</sup> Florida remains one of the hardest-hit states, with thousands of families mourning the loss of loved ones.<sup>2</sup>

Addressing this crisis requires a comprehensive approach, including prevention, treatment, and, most importantly, education. As educators, you have the unique ability to reach young people at a critical time in their lives, and your influence can make all the difference.

Earlier this year, I convened a roundtable with families, law enforcement, and experts to discuss the fentanyl crisis. A key takeaway from our discussion was the urgent need for early education on the dangers of counterfeit medications, illicit drugs, and the harsh reality that just one pill can be fatal.

I was particularly struck by the voices of parents who shared their frustration at the resistance they encountered when trying to bring educational programs on fentanyl awareness into schools. Given that drug overdoses are now one of the leading causes of death among children and adolescents, it is imperative that we work together to protect our students.<sup>3</sup> The statistics are sobering: in 2022, over 1,200 young people aged 14 to 18 lost their lives to drug overdoses. That's the equivalent of losing an entire classroom of students each week.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/nchs\\_press\\_releases/2024/20240515.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/nchs_press_releases/2024/20240515.htm)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/states/florida/fl.htm>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2916744/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.uclahealth.org/news/release/about-22-high-school-age-adolescents-died-each-week>

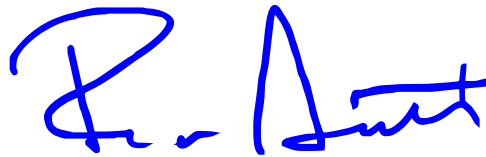
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Experts and law enforcement consistently emphasize that the best way to prevent our children from experimenting with deadly substances is education on the dangers they present. As leaders in education, I urge you to collaborate with advocacy organizations, many of which are based in your communities and provide these services at no-cost, that are ready and eager to provide life-saving information to your students. These organizations are often led by families who have lost loved ones to this crisis, and their stories could be the catalyst that saves a young person's life.

Together, we can make a difference and prevent more families from experiencing the unimaginable pain of losing a child. My team and I are committed to supporting you in this endeavor. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you need resources, connections, or assistance in bringing these important educational programs to your schools.

Thank you for your continued commitment to the children of Florida. Let's work together to ensure a safe, healthy, and successful school year for all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Rick Scott". The signature is stylized with a large initial "R" and a prominent "S".

Rick Scott  
United States Senator