

**Senator Grassley Opening Remarks
Senate Drug Caucus Hearing
“The Precursor Pipeline”
October 24, 2023**

Thank you, Senator Whitehouse, for holding this important hearing. In the last 12 months, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported over 112,000 drug overdose deaths. This number increases each year. For comparison, five years ago, in 2018, the CDC reported just under 70,000 drug overdose deaths.

Behind those statistics are real American families coping with grief. Ashley Romero’s family is counted among those numbers.

On the night of June 11, 2018, Ashley took half of what she thought was a pain pill. Ashley had gone to the hospital over 40 times for stomach pain, and she just wanted some relief.

The pill contained fentanyl. Ashley dropped to the floor. Her boyfriend carried her to her car, where first responders found her dead in the front seat. Ashley was just 32-years-old and had an 8-year-old son.

Ashley's son began to wonder why his mom wasn't there to tuck him in at night. Three days after Ashley died, while his grandpa tucked him into bed, he asked, "Did my mom take a pill and die?"

The fake pill that killed Ashley traced back to Bruce Holder. Bruce's fake pills killed at least seven other people. He imported thousands of fake pills from Mexico to Colorado.

Agents from the FBI, Homeland Security, and the DEA worked hard to track him down, and in January 2023, Bruce received a life sentence.

Today's hearing is going to explore how deadly pills end up in the hands of dealers like Bruce. Criminals in China ship precursor chemicals to cartels in Mexico, who process those chemicals into fentanyl. I look forward to discussing with this panel how Congress can help dismantle the precursor pipeline.

Before we turn to that, I want to thank the agents for their hard work on the Bruce Holder case. Emotional cases take an emotional toll. This case highlights the value of inter-agency cooperation. We work better when we work together. No agency can respond to the fentanyl crisis by itself. I've heard each agency talk of a [Quote] whole of government approach. [End Quote] That approach includes Congress. I look forward to working with each of you all to tackle the fentanyl crisis.