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October 16, 2025

The Honorable Terrance Cole
Administrator
Drug Enforcement Administration
8701 Morrisette Drive
Springfield, VA 22152

Dear Administrator Cole:

I write to request information about the efforts of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) to disrupt the role of chemical brokers in the synthetic opioid supply chain and prevent the diversion of precursor chemicals that can be used to manufacture fentanyl and other synthetic opioids.

Chemical brokers have been described as the “linchpins of the global fentanyl trade”¹ and play a key role in procuring the base chemicals that cartels and other criminal organizations use to manufacture fentanyl to then sell in the United States. According to the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN), chemical brokers “sell and purchase fentanyl precursor chemicals and manufacturing equipment on behalf of their clients and ultimately obfuscate the illicit diversion from mainland [People’s Republic of China] to Mexico.”² Through a complex web of illegitimate shell companies as well as legitimate chemical import-export businesses, chemical brokers are able to clandestinely supply drug cartels with the precursor chemicals that fuel the fentanyl crisis in the United States. These chemicals include illicit precursor chemicals, dual-use pre-precursors that have both licit and illicit uses, as well as essential chemical substances such as catalysts, solvents, and reagents which can be bought and sold legally.

Chemical brokers serve as middlemen, who are rarely involved in either the initial manufacturing of precursor chemicals or their transformation into fentanyl and other synthetic narcotics. Yet brokers’ role in the synthetic opioid supply chain is no less important than that of the chemical manufacturers and cartels. Because of the vast scale of the global chemicals industry and the patchwork legality of precursor chemicals, cartels such as the Sinaloa Cartel and the Jalisco New Generation Cartel are increasingly reliant on chemical brokers with deep connections in the chemicals industry and extensive logistics experience to procure the precursor and dual-use

¹ Reuters, “The shadowy ‘brokers’ helping Mexico’s cartels smuggle fentanyl chemicals from China,” December 18, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/drugs-fentanyl-brokers/>.

² FinCEN, “Supplemental Advisory on the Procurement of Precursor Chemicals and Manufacturing Equipment Used for the Synthesis of Illicit Fentanyl and Other Synthetic Opioids,” June 20, 2024, <https://www.fincen.gov/sites/default/files/advisory/2024-06-20/FinCEN-Supplemental-Advisory-on-Fentanyl-508C.pdf>.

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chemicals needed to manufacture large quantities of fentanyl. While significant public attention has been focused on the role of cartels and chemical manufacturers in the global fentanyl crisis, far less has been focused on brokers who are a key conduit in sourcing and shipping these chemicals across international borders and into Oregon. They are “one of the few bottlenecks in the vast chemical distribution chain”³ responsible for global fentanyl production.

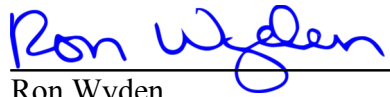
Despite brokers’ substantial role in procuring precursor chemicals that are used to create synthetic narcotics including fentanyl and methamphetamines, they are only infrequently prosecuted or sanctioned for their role in the narcotics supply chain. Closing loopholes and strengthening enforcement against chemical brokers are critical to cutting down the threat of fentanyl as well as other, more powerful, synthetic opioids such as nitazenes. As the leading federal law enforcement agency responsible for U.S. counter-narcotics policy, DEA plays a key part in this effort. Federal law enforcement must also have the resources and tools needed to effectively dismantle and disrupt chemical brokers and their transnational networks. To better understand the scope of this issue, please answer the following questions by November 13, 2025:

1. What efforts has DEA taken to enhance interagency collaboration with the Department of State Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), United States Postal Inspection Service (USPIS) and other agencies to support programs that effectively disrupt chemical brokers and the shipment of precursor chemicals into the U.S.?
2. To what extent does DEA collaborate with the Department of Treasury Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) to support the imposition of targeted sanctions on chemical brokers?
3. How does DEA collaborate with the Department of Justice Office of International Affairs to investigate and secure the extradition of chemical brokers to face trial in the United States?
4. To what extent are chemical brokers and wholesalers working with chemical manufacturers located outside of China?
5. What legal requirements, if any, do chemical manufacturing companies headquartered in the United States have to report suspicious orders received by wholly owned foreign subsidiaries to DEA?
6. How many manufacturers or chemical brokers registered with DEA to purchase List I or List II chemicals have been penalized for illegal importation or distribution of fentanyl precursors?
7. Has DEA been granted access to Suspicious Activity Reports (SARs) on chemical brokers by FinCEN?

³ InSight Crime, “Brokers: Lynchpins of the Precursor Chemical Flow to Mexico,” February 2, 2024. <https://insightcrime.org/investigations/brokers-lynchpins-precursor-chemical-flow-mexico/>.

8. Have DEA and FinCEN collaborated to lead any trainings or conduct specific industry outreach to financial institutions to spot and flag suspicious financial transactions made by chemical brokers?

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ron Wyden". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ron" and last name "Wyden" clearly distinguishable. It is positioned above a horizontal line.

Ron Wyden
United States Senator