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**Yolo County DA to Issue Warning of Homicide Charges
for Narcotics Traffickers Causing Fentanyl-Related Deaths**

Deaths Caused by Reckless Disregard for Known Risk is Driving New Policy

(Woodland, CA) – June 17, 2021 – The Yolo County District Attorney’s Office will now require, with any plea agreement involving narcotics trafficking, that the prosecutor formally advise defendants that they could face homicide charges if they later provide drugs to a person who dies of a Fentanyl overdose.

This new policy stems from the now widespread deaths caused by persons ingesting other illicit drugs like MDMA (“ecstasy”), heroin or street-bought prescription drugs that contain Fentanyl. Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that is up to 100 times more potent than traditional morphine. It is this potency that makes Fentanyl especially dangerous and the frequent cause of overdose deaths. According to the CDC, overdose deaths nationwide associated with Fentanyl were twelve times higher in 2019 than they were in 2013. It was recently reported that deaths from Fentanyl overdoses jumped by more than 2100% in California in five years. Fentanyl is often sold mixed-in (“laced”) with other drugs such as counterfeit Oxycodone pills because it is a cheap way of increasing potency. This was the case in the death of Alexandra Capelouto, a 20-year-old college student from Temecula, who was killed when she unknowingly purchased and consumed a Fentanyl-laced

counterfeit Oxycodone pill from a drug dealer using the social media platform, Snapchat. Alexandra's parents have been advocating for a law that would require an "Alexandra Advisement" on all convictions in CA resulting from the trafficking of Fentanyl. It is estimated that the lethal dose for Fentanyl in humans, even those tolerant of opioids, is 2mg, the weight of a few grains of salt.

Yolo County reports that eight deaths related to Fentanyl occurred in 2020 with four so far this year. On October 21, 2020, 30-year-old Valentino Rodriguez, Jr. died in his home in West Sacramento after taking a drug laced with Fentanyl. Cases involving Fentanyl overdoses in Yolo County are being referred to the FBI's Safe Streets Task Force out of the FBI's Sacramento office.

"These tragedies are now so widespread that drug dealers can no longer deny responsibility for the risk of Fentanyl in their product," District Attorney Jeff Reisig explained. "When people get a DUI," Reisig continued, "we give a warning that DUIs can cause death, which becomes evidence if they later kill someone in a DUI. There must be similar accountability for those selling narcotics knowing their product could very well contain lethal Fentanyl."

Under the new policy, in taking any plea for the manufacture, possession for sale, sales or transportation of controlled substances, the prosecutor shall ensure the accused person is specifically advised that "Illegally selling or furnishing these [Fentanyl-laced] drugs carries with it the specific risk that you are providing drugs laced with a potentially lethal substance and you are advised that if you do so, and a person dies as a result of ingesting Fentanyl-laced product, you can be charged with manslaughter or murder."

This policy is part of the balanced approach the Yolo County District Attorney's Office has taken with narcotics cases. The Office views drug-use and addiction-related drug offenses as a public health issue, rather than a public safety issue. Most of these cases result in diversion where the individual is referred for treatment and does not suffer from a criminal conviction. For those drug-related cases that present a larger risk and greater impact on society, the individuals are prosecuted in a more traditional manner.

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