

Legislation Text

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Authorizing the Philadelphia City Council Committee on Public Safety to hold hearings examining the life-threatening dangers of synthetic cannabinoids, synthetic opioids and other designer drugs.

WHEREAS, Synthetic cannabinoids, also referred to as K2 or Spice, are designer drugs made of a mixture of herbs and spices that are sprayed with various mind-altering chemical compounds; and

WHEREAS, Synthetic cannabinoids are often marketed as a synthetic alternative to marijuana having the same effects as naturally grown marijuana. However, synthetic cannabinoids, which were first created by scientists doing medical research on the endocannabinoid system of mice, were never intended for human consumption; and

WHEREAS, Studies have shown that use of synthetic cannabinoids can be life-threatening, as the drug may be up to 100 times more potent than naturally grown marijuana; and

WHEREAS, The side effects of synthetic cannabinoids include severe agitation and irritability, aggressiveness, anxiety, rapid heartbeat, high blood pressure, nausea, vomiting, muscle spasms, seizures, tremors, hallucinations and psychotic episodes, suicidal thoughts or actions, paralysis, heart and kidney damage, comas, even death; and

WHEREAS, The harmful effects of synthetic cannabinoids were first reported in the United States in 2009. From 2010 to 2015, toxicologists across the country reported treating nearly 500 cases of acute poisoning from synthetic cannabinoids. Additionally, in April of 2015, poison centers across the country had reported receiving 2,365 calls from exposure to synthetic cannabinoids for that year. The United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) reported twenty deaths from the use of synthetic cannabinoids between 2011 and 2015. No antidote is presently available for synthetic cannabinoid intoxication; and

WHEREAS, Several cities and states have reported overdoses and deaths related to the drug's usage. In April of 2015, the State of Alabama reported 317 emergency room department visits within the span of 18 days from individuals who used synthetic cannabinoids. In that same month, the State of Mississippi reported 97 synthetic cannabinoid related cases within a span of eight days. In July of 2016, 33 individuals were found collapsed on a street in Brooklyn, New York after using synthetic cannabinoids. New York City has reported 8,000 synthetic cannabinoid related hospitalizations since January 2015; and

WHEREAS, In 2010, federal policy made it a crime to possess, distribute or manufacture synthetic cannabinoids. The DEA has made many of the chemical compounds Schedule I controlled substances. However, the chemical compounds of the drug frequently changes, much faster than can be detected, to avoid regulations that ban specific compounds; and

WHEREAS, Even with federal regulation and 41 states banning synthetic cannabinoids, the drug is still being sold in many convenient stores, gas stations, and internet websites. The drug is cheap and is often packaged in colorful foil packets using logos geared toward children and youth, with common brand names being "Scooby

Snax,” “Green Giant” and “Ice Dragon”); and

WHEREAS, It has been reported that the use of synthetic cannabinoids is more prevalent in states where recreational usage of naturally grown marijuana is still illegal. Because the chemical compounds of synthetic cannabinoids frequently change, its usage will not appear on a standard drug test and the risks and adverse consequences are often unpredictable; and

WHEREAS, Synthetic opioids, such as W-18 and U-47700, are described as even more dangerous than synthetic cannabinoids. Synthetic opioids are used to increase the effects of heroin and cocaine, and are often mixed into the drugs without the user’s knowledge; and

WHEREAS, W-18 is said to be 10,000 times more potent than morphine, a commonly used opiate. W-18 was invented in the 1980s by researchers at the University of Alberta in Canada. The drug was patented in 1984, but has no approved use outside of scientific research; and

WHEREAS, U-47700 is a synthetic opioid connected to at least 50 deaths nationwide. The drug, which is eight times more powerful than morphine, can be taken orally, injected or snorted. U-47700 was invented in the 1970s by then pharmaceutical manufacturer Upjohn, and was never studied for human use; and

WHEREAS, Both W-18 and U-47700 are shipped legally from laboratories in China. The Drug Enforcement Administration has circulated bulletins warning about the dangers of synthetic opioids. In May of 2016, Pennsylvania Senator Pat Toomey sent a letter to Secretary of State John Kerry urging the Obama administration to put pressure on China to stop exporting synthetic opioids into the United States; and

WHEREAS, Researchers who have studied synthetic opioids believe they are so powerful that their usage can cause overdoses even in microscopic doses. Additionally, researchers fear that most hospitals are not equipped to detect and treat synthetic opioid overdoses. Doctors and emergency responders have reported that synthetic opioids are too powerful to be tamed by Narcan, the opioid overdose antidote, and that it often requires multiple doses to revive a user of synthetic opioids; and

WHEREAS, Synthetic opioids have been suspected in several recent overdoses in the Philadelphia area; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Hereby authorizes the Philadelphia City Council Committee on Public Safety to hold hearings examining the life-threatening dangers of synthetic cannabinoids, synthetic opioids and other designer drugs.