



# Department of Justice

United States Attorney's Offices of Kentucky

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## **KY FEDS APPLAUD PROGRESS IN FIGHT ALONGSIDE STATE PARTNERS IN REDUCING OD DEATHS**

*One overdose death is too many in Kentucky*

LOUISVILLE, Ky. – United States Attorneys Russell Coleman and Robert M. Duncan, Jr. applauded the work today of federal, state, and local law enforcement and health professionals as the overdose death rate in Kentucky took a significant dip with 233 fewer drug fatalities in 2018 than there were in 2017. While the decrease marks an improvement 1,333 Kentuckians lost to dangerous drugs are far too many in any state.

Federal prosecutors will continue to work hand-in-hand with state and local law enforcement agencies to have a significant impact in the fight against heroin and meth in Kentucky. Federal prosecutors sitting in the Eastern and Western Districts are actively prosecuting overdose cases where as little as one pill has caused death or serious bodily injury. U.S. Attorney's Coleman and Duncan acknowledge treatment and prevention efforts are key in solving the crisis, however, enforcement will also remain a vital deterrent.

“Today’s announcement of a 15% decrease in the number overdose deaths in the Commonwealth is certainly positive news and a step in the right direction,” said United States Attorney Robert M. Duncan, Jr. “However, we all recognize there is still work to be done. We remain committed to using all available tools to combat this crisis, including vigorously prosecuting unlawful opioid traffickers, partnering to conduct community outreach and education, and encouraging those needing help to seek treatment.”

“We’re not there yet,” said U.S. Attorney Russell Coleman. “But lives saved last year demonstrates that unity of effort amongst federal, state, and local law enforcement is gaining ground in this fight.”

The Eastern and Western District United States Attorney’s Offices are actively pursuing the cartels that supply the majority of illegal synthetic opioids, like Fentanyl, to the Commonwealth. In addition both offices have Heroin Education Action Teams (USA HEAT) that are aimed at reducing the harm to Kentucky families and communities caused by heroin/opiate abuse by increasing community

understanding of this epidemic. USA HEAT is a partnership between the United States Attorney's Office for the Eastern and Western District of Kentucky and families who have lost a loved one to opiate overdose. These courageous moms, dads, brothers, sisters and children share their story in order to help others avoid the grief of losing a family member to a drug overdose. The Eastern District of Kentucky also utilizes Operation Synthetic Opioid Surge (SOS) in Fayette County dedicated to reducing access to illicit fentanyl.

The Appalachian Regional Prescription Opioid Strike Force (ARPO Strike Force), a joint law enforcement is also bringing dividends on the enforcement front. ARPO brings together the resources and expertise of the Health Care Fraud Unit in the Criminal Division's Fraud Section (HCF Unit), the U.S. Attorney's Offices for nine federal districts in five states, as well as law enforcement partners at the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of the Inspector General (HHS-OIG) and U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). The mission of the ARPO Strike Force is to identify and investigate health care fraud schemes in the Appalachian region and surrounding areas, and to effectively and efficiently prosecute medical professionals and others involved in the illegal prescription and distribution of opioids.

Both districts also utilize Appalachia HIDTA task forces, with the mission to enhance and coordinate drug enforcement efforts of local, state and federal law enforcement agencies within areas designated as High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas by pursuing the disruption/dismantlement of Drug Trafficking Organizations, particularly as it relates to the specific drug threat of the Appalachian region.

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