

# MOTHERS AGAINST DRUG DEATHS

Governor Gavin Newsom  
Office of Governor of California  
1021 O Street, Suite 9000  
Sacramento, CA 95814

May 12, 2022

Dear Governor Newsom,

As mothers whose children have died from drug overdose, are struggling with addiction and homelessness, or at risk in California, we are urging that you call a state of emergency and close California's illegal open drug markets immediately.

California's open drug markets, such as the Tenderloin in San Francisco, operate illegally in plain sight in front of public officials, residents and their children and tourists, in contravention of California law. Any time of the day, any day of the week, people are dealing and using illicit drugs such as illicit fentanyl, meth and other lethal substances out in the open. There is zero barrier preventing anyone including children from entering these markets and succumbing to the drugs, as we can all see from the recent deaths of two young teens (16-year-old Victorria Moran-Hidalgo and the 15 year old Pacific Grove boy) lured in to buy or use drugs in your illegal, open drug markets.

For parents like us who have a front-row seat watching this tragedy unfold in slow motion, it's frankly unbelievable that the [US Department of Justice Drug Enforcement Agency's office issued a warning about California's permissive attitude about open, illicit drug dealing almost two years ago](#). As Wade R. Shannon, Special Agent in Charge of the DEA, wrote on September 30, 2020: "The epicenter of this fentanyl disaster is the Tenderloin neighborhood in San Francisco....The Tenderloin neighborhood is also home to an open-air drug market that is spreading death throughout the Bay Area. The drug dealing that is openly oppressing the Tenderloin is quietly undermining neighborhoods across San Francisco, Oakland, San Mateo, Sonoma, Marin County and elsewhere."

Tragically, despite the DEA's clear warning and incontrovertible evidence on the streets, you have let the open markets persist. In that time, nearly 1,000 people in San Francisco have died from overdose according to the examiner's report, racking up the fourth-highest overdose mortality rate in the country. In addition to this staggering death toll, there are countless others reported in the media who aren't captured in San Francisco's overdose numbers, such as 16-year-old Victorria Moran-Hidalgo found dead in

February in San Francisco's South of Market area from acute intoxication and sexual abuse, the 15 year old Pacific Grove boy who died in March from fentanyl purchased in San Francisco, and the sharply rising overdose deaths that [Humboldt County Board of Supervisors has directly traced back to the open drug markets in San Francisco](#).

While San Francisco's leadership needs to do more, you need to step in and stop the open drug markets across the state, as they are illegal, immoral and causing far more harm than can possibly be measured. It is shameless to imagine that your laissez-faire approach is benefiting the unhoused addicts. You can see first hand accounts from some of our members below of what it is like for parents and their children struggling on the streets in the grip of addiction fueled by the open markets.

Over 15 Californians die every day from a drug overdose-some are young, curious teens experimenting for their first time. Never before has the risk been so great for first-time drug users. The first time can mean death. Does your child understand that?

With so many lives on the line, you must not wait any longer to step in and close California's open drug markets. It's your legal and moral responsibility to enforce California laws which prohibit use and possession of illicit drugs including fentanyl.

It's hopefully unnecessary to belabor the point, but as mothers and families who are affected by this crisis, we will continue to fight for protection under the law for our children.

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#### **Quotes from some of our members about San Francisco's Open Drug Markets:**

"My youngest son got addicted to oxy back in 2016. He has been on the streets of the Tenderloin since then. He has overdosed and been in and out of jail. His drug of choice is now fentanyl . He tells me 'Mom whatever drug you want is on the street corners.'"

"My son ( 27) frequents the TL everyday and sometimes for days at a time. He's addicted to fentanyl and meth. I'm infuriated by how this is being handled there. I've thought about writing the people in charge of this circus to let them know if something happens to my son I'm holding them accountable. It's a daily thing for my son. He boasts, he sells his stolen goods at the civic and buys his drugs on Turk. He's told me about how he's thought he'd be arrested about a dozen times, but the cops either turn their heads or rough him up and let him go."

"My middle son, 24 years old, is another lost soul living on the streets in the Tenderloin. My son was always very close to me and I know his heart is breaking seeing what I'm going through with him. The last time I talked to him, he just put his head down and cried. I hugged him and we both cried for probably 10 minutes straight. San Francisco needs to do something about what is going on!!! There's tons of officers around and they do absolutely nothing! I stopped to talk to these 2 officers on bikes. I asked them why are they there. People are just using and selling right in from of them. They replied, that they aren't allowed to intervene. They are just there to show their presence. They only intervene if they see violence or something of that nature."

"My 25-yr-old son is out there in the Tenderloin, homeless, sick - physically and mentally just like your precious children. He is suffering so much but there is nothing I can do. He is afraid of the withdrawals. He calls me when he can - he has lost his phone, IDs, everything. I can't help feeling that his disease is much worse because he is in SF where it is so easy to remain addicted."

"My 23 year old daughter is drug addicted and living on the streets of the tenderloin in San Francisco. She is not in a position to make good decisions and get help for herself. I have been trying to contact service providers, the police, detox units, Mayor Breed and Governor Newsom. Unsurprisingly no response from London Breeds office or Gavin Newsom. The system is allowing her to risk death every day. I need help to try and save her and am at a great loss about how to do that. She steals food from Whole Foods and sells it to a local restaurant. The Tenderloin police precinct office says they can't arrest her because of the decriminalization laws. All of the free food and freedom to buy and use drugs in the open continues to enable her. I couldn't be more hopeless."

"My daughter is new to recovery after a long struggle with addiction on these streets. I worry every single day that she will return to that scene. It has become far too easy to get drugs and to get high then it is to get treatment in California. Sadly, the overdose rates will continue to climb until a state-wide emergency action is taken by Governor Newsom to close down the open drug markets."

"My son Trevor will always be 18 years old because he experimented with a counterfeit oxycodone and died from fentanyl poisoning in his dorm room at Sonoma State in 2019 - yet I have not seen enough being done in that time to stop deaths from illicit fentanyl, especially, as a SF Small Business owner, seeing open air drug markets allowed to flourish in The City without ANY consequences. And this week, the CDC announced another 15% increase in overdoses involving fentanyl and other synthetic opioids over 2020, with deaths already up 23% since my first year of activism, when Trevor died. We MUST do more, Governor Newsom!"

"My 15 year old son goes to public school in San Francisco and I worry every day if it will be his last. It's not just that you can get drugs easily in San Francisco, it's the permissive attitude of the government, law enforcement, as if it is not a big deal to light up with foil and straw at any time."

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Sincerely,

Jacqui Berlinn, Bay Area-based mother of Corey, an unsheltered resident in San Francisco  
Corey Kremlacek, Bay Area-based mother of Terry, an unsheltered resident in San Francisco  
Gina McDonald, Bay Area-based mother of a Sam, a recovering addict who frequented the open drug market in San Francisco  
Michelle Leopold, SF Small Business Owner, Bay Area-based mother of Trevor who died at age 18 of fentanyl poisoning  
Ellen Grantz, San Francisco mother of two teenagers in San Francisco public schools

**What we want: <https://mothersagainstdrugdeaths.org/what-we-want>**