



The Honorable Deputy Mayor Jeff Gorell
200 N. Spring St, Room 303
Los Angeles, CA 90012

March 5, 2018

Dear Deputy Mayor Gorell,

On behalf of the Partnership for Safe Medicines, a coalition of over 65 organizations dedicated to protecting Americans from counterfeit medication, I want to express our concern over the increased danger of counterfeits made with fentanyl in circulation in Los Angeles.

In light of the ongoing and increasing danger of counterfeits made with fentanyl, we respectfully request that you reconsider staffing reductions and officer reassignments in the LAPD Anti-counterfeiting unit and HALT. We respectfully urge you to fully staff these units to ensure public health and safety.

At this moment all over the country, towns large and small are grappling with a flood of counterfeit medications made with deadly imported fentanyl. Perfect looking copies of drugs like Xanax and oxycodone but made with deadly quantities of fentanyl have claimed lives. Our research staff has tracked these deadly fakes to forty three different states and documented fatalities in twenty of them so far, including the musician Prince who was killed by a fake opioid that had a deadly quantity of fentanyl.

We have entered a new era of counterfeit danger. It used to require major machinery to produce counterfeits, and the startup cost was prohibitive enough that we only saw them come from major unregulated manufacturing centers such as China. While deadly fentanyl is still being manufactured in China, it's often smuggled into the United States and pressed into fake pills in garages in America. A common pill press can now be had for less than \$500 that makes very convincing but deadly fake drugs.

At the Port of Los Angeles in 2017 Customs and Border Protection confiscated 396 pill presses, an increase of nearly 2,000% over 2011's pill press interceptions.¹

At this critical time when counterfeit medications are flooding the American drug supply, we are deeply concerned to learn that staffing for LAPD's Anti-Piracy Unit has been greatly reduced and that LAPD officers assigned to the L.A. County Health Authority Law Enforcement Task Force (HALT) have been reassigned. Los Angeles is poised to experience a wave of deadly

¹ Katie Zezema, "Counterfeit opioid pills are tricking users — sometimes with lethal results," *The Washington Post*, November 19, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/counterfeit-opioid-pills-are-tricking-users--sometimes-with-lethal-results/2017/11/19/d34ed6b14-be4b-11e7-8444-a0d4f04b89eb_story.html?utm_term=.9a9cbf747340.

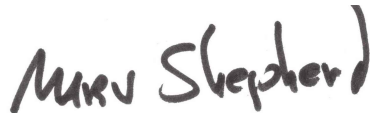
counterfeits made with fentanyl and with it an expected increase of associated crimes from the organized crime organizations and gangs that make a living from such counterfeit operations. Having fully operational and fully staffed anti-counterfeiting units and task forces in L.A. county is critical to protect the public from crime and ensure public health and safety.

Just last month Fox 11 did a story about counterfeit Xanax being openly sold through a local DJ's instagram account.² The last 24 months have had a plethora of incidents that should make the case that a reduced law enforcement presence is not warranted:

- November 2017: In a Rolling Stone interview, producer Timbaland discussed his own history of addiction to pain pills and warned of the prevalence of counterfeit pills containing fentanyl.³
- October 2017: Rocker Tom Petty suffered a heart attack and collapsed in his home. Toxicology test results found two illicit fentanyl analogues - acetyl fentanyl and despropionyl fentanyl - in his system.⁴
- September 2017: Diego Rafael Alvarez of Elysian Valley pleaded guilty to selling counterfeit drugs out of the back of his SUV.⁵
- June 2017: L.A. City Attorney Mike Feuer took steps to shut down Dulceria Del Valle, a Pacoima candy store, after its owners were charged with illegally selling prescription drugs without a license. Feuer warned the public that the medicines were counterfeit.⁶

The counterfeit trade in Los Angeles has a trail of convictions that go back years. We thank you for taking the time to consider our concerns.

Sincerely,



Marv Shepherd, Ph.D., Board President, the Partnership for Safe Medicines
Professor Emeritus, College of Pharmacy, University of Texas

² Bill Melugin, Counterfeit Xanax laced with deadly fentanyl becoming popular party drug, *Fox 11*, February 12, 2018, <http://www.foxla.com/entertainment/features/counterfeit-xanax-laced-with-deadly-fentanyl-becoming-popular-party-drug>.

³ Jonathan Ringen, "Timbaland Comes Back From the Brink," *Rolling Stone*, November 27, 2017, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/features/timbaland-kicked-oxycontin-self-doubt-to-stage-comeback-w512403>.

⁴ Pat Anson, "Tom Petty Overdosed on Opioids and Anxiety Medication," *Pain News Network*, January 20, 2018, <https://www.painnewsnetwork.org/stories/2018/1/20/tom-petty-overdosed-on-opioids-and-anxiety-medication>.

⁵ "Elysian Valley man convicted of selling counterfeit Viagra from his vehicle," *The Eastsider*, September 27, 2017, <https://www.theeastsiderla.com/2017/09/elysian-valley-man-convicted-of-selling-counterfeit-viagra-from-his-vehicle/>.

⁶ Elizabeth Chou, "Pacoima candy store allegedly sold 'counterfeit' drugs, LA city attorney says," *Los Angeles Daily News*, June 12, 2017, <https://www.dailynews.com/2017/06/12/pacoima-candy-store-allegedly-sold-counterfeit-drugs-la-city-attorney-says/>.