

**Senate Caucus on
International Narcotics Control
Hearing on “Dangerous Synthetic Drugs”
Wednesday, September 25, 2013**

**Prepared Statement of
Co-Chairman Chuck Grassley of Iowa**

Madam Chairman, it's been over two years since this caucus held its first hearing on synthetic drug abuse. At that hearing, we heard testimony from a constituent of mine named Michael Rozga (Roz-gah). Mr. Rozga's son David committed suicide shortly after smoking “K2.” “K2” is synthetic marijuana that is very different from the naturally occurring plant. David had legally purchased this synthetic drug at a local shopping mall. He then had a very rapid and negative reaction to it. I said then that David may have been the first person in the United States to die from using this kind of synthetic drug, but surely he wouldn't be the last.

Sadly, my concerns were validated, as the abuse of synthetic drugs continued to escalate. From 2010 to 2011, the number of calls received by poison control centers related to synthetic marijuana increased from 2,906 to 6,959. And similar calls about the synthetic drugs known as “bath salts” increased from 304 to 6,138. Emergency room visits associated with these synthetic drugs rose sharply as well.

In 2012, Congress responded to this crisis. I worked with you, Madam Chairman, as well as Senators Schumer, Klobuchar and many others, to pass the

Synthetic Drug Abuse Prevention Act of 2012. That legislation placed many of these synthetic drugs on Schedule I, making them illegal. That was an important step to help protect our young people from the effects of these drugs.

There is some evidence that that legislation had a positive effect. In 2012, calls to poison control centers related to synthetic marijuana dropped from 6,959 to 5,205. Similar calls related to “bath salts” dropped from 6,138 to 2,657.

But new synthetic drugs have emerged since we passed that legislation. Traffickers need only to alter the chemical structure of their drugs to effectively circumvent the law. And these drugs continue to ruin lives in communities across the country.

In just the past few weeks, news reports have linked a synthetic form of ecstasy called “Molly” to the deaths of at least four young people in Boston, New York, and here in Washington. What seems especially concerning is that authorities may not yet have a clear understanding of precisely what substances are contained in “Molly.” Regardless of its precise chemical makeup, there appears little doubt that “Molly” is a clear and present threat to the health and safety of our young people.

My home state of Iowa also continues to be affected by synthetic drugs. On a single weekend last May, three teenagers in the Des Moines area were sent to emergency rooms after smoking synthetic marijuana. One of them reportedly suffered cardiac arrest.

There is some good news, however. In communities across the country, citizens are helping to sound the alarm about the dangers of synthetic drugs.

The Rozga family continues to share David's story. They have also started a website, K2drugfacts.com, which provides a forum for folks who've survived encounters with synthetic drugs to share their stories.

A community group called "Iowans Against Synthetics" has successfully pushed to have this week declared "Synthetic Drugs Awareness Week" in Johnson County, Iowa.

The Iowa Governor's Office of Drug Control Policy has also taken steps to raise awareness about emerging drug trends such as synthetics. Beginning this month, the office is issuing a monthly newsletter called *The Connection*. The newsletter will publish the latest news about new drugs in Iowa and trends among young people.

But despite these positive actions, synthetic drug manufacturers still have the ability to circumvent the law by slightly altering their chemical compounds. A change of a molecule or two to a banned drug is sometimes enough to make a new and legal alternative. This is a difficult problem without an easy solution. But I look forward to hearing from the witnesses and working with you, Madam Chairman, to explore how we can continue to be effective in combatting the abuse of these dangerous synthetic drugs.