



RESPONSE TO ATTACKS ON FORENSIC REVIEW

6.8.2026

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WASHINGTON, D.C. -- June 8, 2026

The American Kratom Association (AKA) today responded to criticism directed at Dr. Heidi Sykora following her presentation at the American Kratom Association Congressional Briefing on June 2, 2026 that examined errors, omissions, and misinterpretations in autopsy and toxicology reports that have been used to attribute deaths to natural kratom leaf products.

The inappropriate attacks by some members of the anti-kratom community is deeply troubling. Rather than engage the scientific findings presented by Dr. Sykora, critics have resorted to personal attacks and attempts to discourage the independent review of forensic evidence.

That approach serves no one, not grieving families, not policymakers, and certainly not the pursuit of truth.

Dr. Sykora's presentation did not criticize family members who have suffered the loss of a loved one. It did not question their grief, their sincerity, or their motivations. Instead, her presentation focused on the quality and completeness of the forensic investigations that produced conclusions later cited in legislative hearings, regulatory proceedings, media reports, and public campaigns advocating bans on natural kratom leaf products.

Those are two very different things.

When a death is publicly presented as evidence supporting public policy changes, the underlying forensic evidence becomes subject to scrutiny. That scrutiny is not only appropriate, it is essential. Scientific conclusions should never be shielded from review simply because they are emotionally difficult to discuss.

The reports analyzed by Dr. Sykora were publicly available autopsy reports, toxicology findings, and official investigative documents that have already been placed into the public domain and repeatedly cited by advocates seeking restrictions or prohibitions on kratom products.

The central question raised by Dr. Sykora was straightforward: Did the forensic evidence support the conclusions that were reported?

In several cases, the answer appears to be far more complicated than legislators and public health officials were led to believe.

Dr. Sykora's analysis identified concerns involving incomplete toxicological evaluations, failures to account for the presence of multiple substances, departures from accepted forensic practices, unsupported assumptions regarding causation, and conclusions that may not fully align with the underlying evidence. Those concerns are directed at the investigative process, not at the families who relied upon those findings.

Indeed, if mistakes were made, the individuals most harmed by those mistakes may be the families themselves.

Every family deserves accurate answers about the death of a loved one. If a coroner or medical examiner reached a conclusion based on incomplete information, overlooked evidence, or flawed methodology, then families may have been denied the full truth about what occurred. Likewise, legislators and regulators may have relied on incomplete or inaccurate information when considering policies affecting millions of consumers.

The American Kratom Association therefore challenges those who have publicly criticized Dr. Sykora's presentation to take a different approach.

Rather than discouraging families from sharing autopsy reports, toxicology findings, and investigative records for independent review, we urge them to welcome such scrutiny. If the evidence supports the conclusions that have been publicly advanced, an independent review will confirm it. If it does not, families and policymakers deserve to know that as well.

Truth should never fear examination.

We are particularly troubled by reports that members of the Kratom Danger Awareness community have advised families not to share records for independent scientific review. Such advice undermines transparency and prevents the very process that could provide families with the most complete understanding of what happened to their loved ones.

Scientific inquiry is not an act of disrespect. It is an act of responsibility.

The personal attacks directed at Dr. Sykora are especially disappointing. Dr. Sykora is a respected

medical professional whose obligation is to follow the evidence wherever it leads. Disagreeing with her conclusions is one thing. Attempting to discredit or intimidate a scientist for conducting an evidence-based review is another entirely.

Science advances through examination, challenge, and verification, not through censorship, intimidation, or character attacks.

The AKA remains committed to a simple principle: every death deserves a thorough, objective, and scientifically rigorous investigation. Families deserve accurate answers.

Equally important, policymakers deserve accurate information. The public deserves confidence that decisions affecting public health are grounded in facts rather than assumptions.

No family should ever be weaponized in a policy debate. But neither should grief be used as a shield to prevent legitimate scientific review of forensic evidence.

The pursuit of truth requires courage, transparency, and a willingness to follow the evidence wherever it leads. We invite all parties — including critics of Dr. Sykora's presentation — to join us in that effort.

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