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Committees

Financial Institutions, Housing &  
Urban Development  
Aging and Long Term Care  
Energy and Natural Resources

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Chairman Manning, Vice-Chair Rezabek, Ranking Member Celebrezze, and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee. Thank you for providing the opportunity to present sponsor testimony on House Bill 455, the Drug Trafficking Deterrence Act.

Prescription painkillers, heroin, and other illegal drugs have killed thousands of Ohioans. Families and communities throughout our state have been devastated by the effect of these drugs, ripping at the fabric of our society. Ohio has lost over twenty thousand individuals to unintentional drug overdoses in the past eight years, and unfortunately, that number continues to grow. Each one of these Ohioans has a story. They have a face and they have a family. As an elected official, I have met some of those who have been left behind, bearing the cross of significant tragedy. And as a friend, I have witnessed the heartbreaking toll the loss of a Son can have on a strong family.

Drug overdoses continue to rise from the trafficking of heroin, fentanyl, and cocaine. Sophisticated drug trafficking organizations have made themselves at home here in Ohio, and the state predicts that cocaine/fentanyl mixed overdose deaths will continue to rise in the future. Using refined means of production, transportation, marketing, and distribution, they have been able to establish themselves with little fear of the criminal charges they face. Ohio's law is too weak to deter drug traffickers from continuing to flood our streets with their products. Law Enforcement Officers have grown weary and demoralized from arresting the same criminals for drug trafficking, only to see them released into society with little more than the slap on the wrist. If we are serious about combatting the drug epidemic in Ohio, we need to be resolute in our dedication to eradicating these organizations from our state. Since 2012, Ohio has decreased the incarceration of drug traffickers by 4 percent. During this same time, unintentional overdose deaths have increased by 212 percent. This is unacceptable. That is why I have introduced the Drug Trafficking Deterrence Act.

This bill ensures that if someone traffics heroin, fentanyl, cocaine, or other Schedule I and II drugs in Ohio, they will be charged with a minimum felony in the third degree, and will face a mandatory prison sentence. Drug trafficking penalties already codified are enhanced, and mandatory prison sentences will be required for all who are convicted of drug trafficking. No longer will drug dealers be able to operate in this state with little fear for the law, and Ohio will draw a clear distinction in criminal penalties between trafficking and simply possessing illegal drugs.

We are in a battle for the future of Ohio. Without deterring drugs from entering and being produced in the state, we are failing those who are currently addicted, and we are jeopardizing our state's future. The Drug Trafficking Deterrence Act would give prosecutors and police the support they need as they pursue these criminals and remove them from our streets.

Thank you once again, and I would be more than happy to answer any questions at this time.