



Representative Miller's Sponsor Testimony on behalf of HB 520 (Increase penalty for Solicitation)

Thank you members of the committee, Chairman Manning, Vice Chair Rezabek, and Ranking Member Celebrezze. I also want to thank Representative Hughes for working together on this bill as a joint sponsor.

HB 520 is a simple bill that can make giant strides cleaning up our streets and helping to alleviate one of the adverse effects of the opioid crisis.

After talking to hundreds of people in my district, particularly advocates on the Hilltop and south side, I heard over and over again how prostitution has increased in proportion to the opioid crisis. People are searching out certain neighborhoods to get drugs and to engage in illegal activities.

According to Police, over the last two years the number of prostitution-related arrests has increased by more than 30 percent. The Polaris Project determined that more than two-thirds of women involved in human trafficking who were addicted to opioids became prostitutes after their opioid use began.

The increase is reflective of a cycle where addicts are forced into prostitution to feed their habit. Breaking the cycle is a key step in helping addicts, reducing crime, and ending the opioid crisis. One part of breaking the cycle between prostitution and the opioid crisis is to target those exploiting addicts.

In Franklin County, a first-time offense for soliciting is considered a third-degree misdemeanor. Such a crime leads to a maximum sentence of 60 days in jail and a fine of up to \$500. Most convictions result in a small fine, typically to a paltry \$150. This is not a strong enough deterrent.

This bill would increase that penalty to a first-degree misdemeanor, increase the fine, and allow judges to designate up to half of the fine to Ohio's Victims of Human Trafficking Fund. The Fund goes to treating, caring for, rehabilitating, educating, housing, and providing assistance for victims.

While we must continue to help addicts through prevention programs, we cannot turn a blind eye to those who are, in large part, enabling the opioid crisis to continue.

I thank the committee for your time and attention to this important issues and I would be happy to answer any questions.