

Chairman Blessing, Vice Chair Reineke, Ranking Member Clyde, and members of the House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 424, the Substance Recovery and Workforce Improvement Act.

This General Assembly is committed to eradicating substance abuse in our state. To further this mission, I will introduce the Substance Recovery and Workforce Improvement Act. This bill will ensure public unemployment dollars are not subsidizing drug use, individuals are being held responsible for their actions, and businesses are protected from unemployment premium increases. Importantly, this bill will ensure those afflicted with drug addiction are made aware of treatment options in their area.

The fatal and inhibiting effects of substance abuse and addiction have not only devastated families and communities, but Ohio's workforce has been tremendously hindered. Many business leaders throughout my district stated they want to expand their businesses, but cannot find the workforce needed because individuals cannot pass a drug test. The First House District is not the only region of the state that faces this issue.

If we are to truly address the detrimental effects opiates have accosted upon our society, elected officials must ask the tough questions and evaluate current state programs. Ohio's unemployment system sadly enables drug use. If an individual receiving unemployment is on drugs, and is not hired by a business because they failed or refused the pre-employment drug test, they are still eligible for unemployment benefits. By subsidizing individuals who continue to use drugs through the unemployment system, Ohio is encouraging the individual to continue this destructive addiction.

Further, employers that fire an employee due to drug use have in some circumstances witnessed their unemployment experience rise due to these individuals claiming unemployment. The appeals process required to prove to Job and Family Services the individual was fired for just cause has proven to be more costly than the business simply allowing the individual to collect unemployment. As a result, some businesses find it too expensive to challenge the drug user's unemployment benefits, further encouraging an individual to stay unemployed and addicted to drugs.

Current unemployment public policy inhibits job growth and permits drug use. Supported by the Ohio Chamber of Commerce and the NFIB, the Substance Recovery and Workforce Improvement Act would:

- Establish a voluntary initiative for businesses to submit the failed or refused drug tests of pre-employment tests to JFS.
- If an individual failed or refused a pre-employment drug test, and they are currently receiving unemployment benefits, they are no longer eligible for unemployment benefits. JFS shall disenroll the individual from unemployment and provide the individual with a list of treatment options in the region.
- Employers who fire an employee due to the failure or refusal to take a drug test may submit this information to JFS.

- Individuals who lose their job due to failing or refusing to complete a drug test are ineligible for unemployment insurance. JFS shall inform the individual of their ineligibility if they apply for unemployment, and will provide the individual with a list of treatment options available in the region.

Personal accountability, deterrence, and compassion must all be present in policies we enact to attack the drug epidemic.

Once again, thank you for this opportunity, and I would be more than happy to answer any questions at this time.