



Testimony on Ohio House Bill 49
Hamilton County Commissioner Denise Driehaus
March 21, 2017

Chair Romanchuk, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services, thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill 49 and the urgent need for support.

Hamilton County has been particularly hard hit by the statewide heroin epidemic and the challenges of this public health crisis. Lives have been lost, families have been devastated and communities have been destabilized. At the same time, the epidemic has put a strain on many of our systems of government from law enforcement, courts and the jail, to recovery services and child welfare. In response, our community formed the Hamilton County Heroin Coalition (HCHC), which is a partnership between law enforcement, prevention agencies, public health, and treatment agencies to increase efficiencies and develop better strategies to address the heroin epidemic. The HCHC understands that in order to make a difference, different systems need to collaborate to create important links and break down silos. We have been able to help connect the dots to get those suffering from addiction into treatment. We are also advocating as a group for resources at the federal, state, and local level. We are in the process of applying for grants and reaching out to community partners so that we can expand our efforts. We are hopeful that, as you set priorities in the budget and determine ways to help address the heroin epidemic ravaging our communities, you will provide resources to the work of the HCHC in addition to broad funding for the strategies that are working to save lives across the state.

Our coalition has been active for two years and has developed several innovative programs that are working to save lives in our community.

1) Quick Response Teams (\$633,000)

Quick Response Teams (QRT's) partner law enforcement, emergency medical personnel, and treatment staff to conduct an in-home visit within one week of an overdose and administration of naloxone. The QRT (law enforcement, EMS, and a treatment specialist) visits the home of the person who recently overdosed to offer support and guidance to the individual and family. Survivors will receive an assessment to identify level of care and next steps. The QRT continues to follow up, encourage treatment and remove barriers to accessing treatment and resources. The treatment specialist provides information, support and encouragement as well as connection to community resources. Two nonprofit agencies are currently partnering with multiple law enforcement jurisdictions in Hamilton County to provide this service. A state investment of \$633,000 would fund three additional teams in Hamilton County.

2) County Jail Heroin Recovery Pod (\$200,000)

Hamilton County Sheriff Jim Neil has pioneered a program within the Hamilton County Justice Center to reduce recidivism and set inmates on the path to recovery. The voluntary program



segregates inmates struggling with addiction into a separate pod and provides peer support, psycho-social therapies, and Medically Assisted Treatment. The program also links participants who are exiting the jail with treatment agencies and peer mentors. The Sherriff began the program in 2016 exclusively for women. In 2017, Hamilton County is investing an additional \$200,000 to extend the program to men, sustain the social services provided and to fund a coordinator to track outcomes and manage the program. Early indications are that the program has been effective in linking inmates to care and reducing recidivism. It has also shown the collateral benefit of reducing conflict between inmates and improving officer safety inside the facility. An additional investment of \$200,000 from the state would help the county to expand evidence-based educational programming and sustain Medically Assisted Treatment in the pod.

3) Easing the Burden on Child Protective Services (various dollar amounts)

Hamilton County's child welfare system has been overwhelmed by new cases. In total, there were 3,794 reports requiring investigation in the last half of 2016, compared to 2,693 during the first half of the year. This trend continued into 2017 with 732 allegations in January – the highest monthly total in at least a decade. In addition, the number of children coming into custody and requiring long-term involvement is growing. Hamilton County's current number of foster children – more than 1,100 -- is the most in at least 20 years. In 2016, HCJFS had 2,918 children in custody. That is nearly 1,000 more than the 2,029 in custody in 2010. The additional cases have increased social worker caseloads well above the industry standard, and high caseloads have contributed to high turnover and additional employee costs. There are a number of budgetary adjustments the state could make to alleviate this system strain.

- i. Provide a significant increase in child welfare money from the General Revenue Fund. PCSAO has asked for a **\$20 million** increase statewide, which we support.
- ii. Provide funding to counties or lead a statewide-effort to recruit foster and adoptive parents. There is a great need for an awareness campaign around fostering and adopting.
- iii. Create and incentivize a pipeline of caseworkers from the state universities to child welfare agencies.
- iv. Help counties fund child care for kinship providers. 25 percent of children in county custody are with kin providers. **\$300,000** annually would provide much needed support to kinship providers who are not eligible for federal child care assistance.

4) Continued Investment In Naloxone for First Responders and Treatment Agencies (\$170,000/year)

Hamilton County's law enforcement and first responder communities have been in the forefront in the quick administration of Naloxone. In 2016 alone, Hamilton County distributed 5,092 doses of Naloxone to first responders, EMS and community providers provided, saving over 1,000 lives. The Heroin Coalition, through the Hamilton County Board of Health, tracks data on Naloxone doses, and uses that information to distribute the drug efficiently and strategically, first to emergency responders, and then to treatment and prevention agencies. The state has been an excellent partner in providing Naloxone to our Board of Health and we request that partnership continue in the amount of 5,000 doses per year, roughly \$170,000.

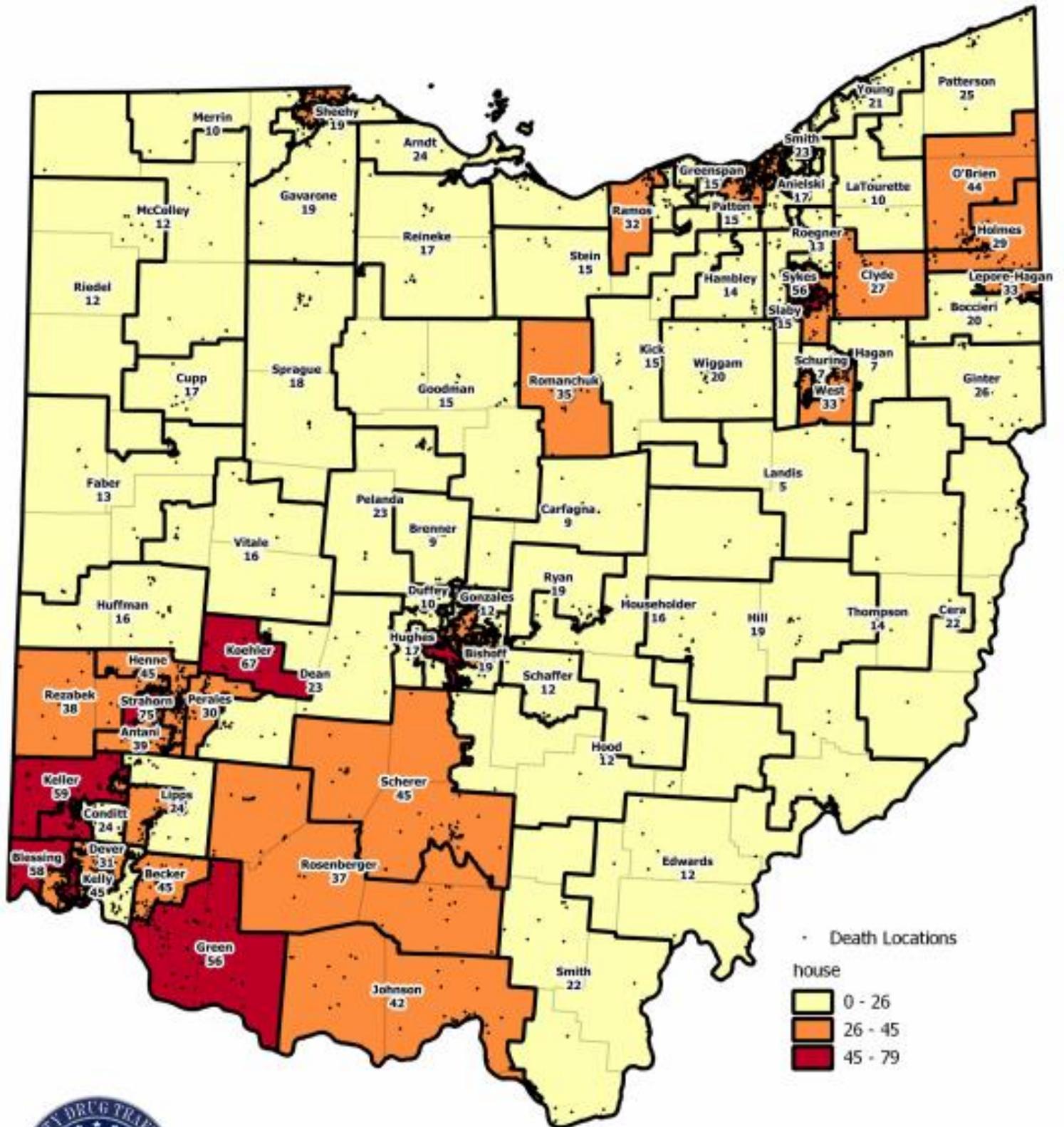


5) Improving linkage to care through the Help Line (\$120,000)

Linkage to treatment providers is one of the most substantial challenges in fighting this heroin crisis. The Addiction Services Council facilitates a Help Line in our region that is continually staffed and can place people suffering from addiction into a treatment program within days. It provides a resource not only for the people served, but also for law enforcement, first responders, and family members. \$120,000 would provide necessary stabilizing funding to keep this 24/7 resource sustainable.

As the former Ranking Member on the House Finance Committee, I appreciate your commitment to strategic use of state dollars to fund what works. The experts assembled in Hamilton County have been working on this issue for several years, and you can be confident that the programs outlined above work. Hamilton County is investing heavily in these programs, and with your partnership, our efforts have the potential to be transformative, while providing models that can be replicated throughout the state. Thank you for your attention. I am happy to answer any questions.

Overdose Deaths by State House District Ohio - 2015



Source: Ohio Department of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics,
2015 Ohio Death Certificate File