



Major Crimes Unit

Fairfield – Hocking - Athens

January 29, 2018

Senator Dave Burke
Chairman
Ohio Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee

Dear Chairman Burke, Vice Chairman Beagle, Ranking Member Tavares and other esteemed members of the Committee:

As the Commander of the Fairfield-Hocking-Athens Major Crimes Unit, a multijurisdictional law enforcement task force I wanted to share with you and the members of your committee my thoughts on House Bill 50. In addition to my role as the Commander of the Major Crimes Unit I am also the Past President of the Ohio Narcotic Officers Association, an executive board member of the Ohio Task Force Commanders Association, a member of the Ohio Department of Public Safety Drug Enforcement Executive Committee, and the Ohio Delegate to the National Narcotics Officers Association Coalition.

Thirty of my thirty-four years in law enforcement have been spent in the specialized field of drug enforcement investigating every level of drug related crimes across our great state. As we now find ourselves amid the greatest drug epidemic ever faced by our great nation Ohio is considered by many to be ground zero. The proliferation of drugs and substance abuse disorders has affected every community in our state putting a strain on public safety resources, social services, medical professionals, and our citizens.

The proliferation of drugs is largely fueled by two things, the disease of addiction and greed. Our state faces a crisis in which a user/addict based population traffics in small quantities of drugs like heroin, fentanyl, and methamphetamine. These same offenders also commit other crimes like theft, fraud and crimes against persons severely impacting the quality of life in neighborhoods across the state while domestic and foreign based criminal organizations exploit this crisis to increase their vast profits.

Over the course of my career one thing has remained constant, that being the exchange of goods and services for drugs. Although cash has always been the preferred method of payment virtually every single person who sells drugs has been willing to accept alternative methods of payment in exchange for drugs. Those payments routinely include stolen property, sexual favors, and even the EBT SNAP cards. As an undercover officer it was common for me to use at that time food stamps, untaxed cigarettes, and merchandise as a form of payment for narcotics. I assure you that if I were still working

as an undercover officer today I would use the EBT SNAP cards as a form of payment to purchase drugs and establish my credibility as a "Bad guy". As I author this letter Police Officers and Drug Enforcement Officers across Ohio are seizing and purchasing drugs, executing search warrants on suspected drug houses and arresting drug offenders. Those officers will confiscate EBT SNAP or Direction cards because of their enforcement actions. At my task force alone, we seize these cards in approximately eighty-five percent of our investigations. In virtually every instance those cards do not belong to the person arrested but rather have been traded or exchanged as currency for illegal narcotics.

Because we know that drug addiction and drug related crime occurs at higher rates at or below the poverty line it is often the case that those affected by drug addiction use whatever means are at their disposal to fuel their substance abuse disorder. In one arrest the Major Crimes Unit confiscated ten EBT SNAP cards from a single offender. In many cases the cards are exchanged at a reduced rate often for as little as fifty cents on the dollar further exploiting those in need.

As someone who has witnessed firsthand the negative impact of drug use, and drug trafficking in our communities I believe that House Bill 50 will reduce the use of EBT SNAP cards as a form of currency to purchase illegal drugs. It is the anonymity of the current system which makes this form of payment attractive to those involved in the drug trade. By placing identification photos of those issued the cards directly on them I am confident that drug users and traffickers will be far less likely to accept them as a form of payment and more likely to use them for their intended purpose.

The EBT SNAP card program benefits thousands of Ohioans each day by providing them with the means to obtain food in which to feed their families and provide nourishment to the most vulnerable of Ohio's citizens, our children. It is an unfortunate circumstance that some choose to feed their addiction with these cards leaving our children at risk.

With the passage of House Bill 50 I believe that this committee has an opportunity to greatly reduce or possibly eliminate the fraudulent use of these cards to purchase illegal drugs while simultaneously providing safeguards to ensure that needy children across Ohio are receiving the nourishment these cards were designed to provide.

Although I was unable to appear before the committee today, I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to advocate on behalf of this piece of important legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dennis J. Lowe". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dennis J. Lowe

Commander