

Chair Merrin, Vice-Chair Manning, Ranking Member Boyd, and members of the House Health Committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to offer sponsor testimony on House Bill 29.

If signed into law, House Bill 29 will require the purchaser of any over-the-counter product containing the drug dextromethorphan to be 18 years of age or older. This bill is an amended reintroduction of HB 73 from the 132nd and HB 197 from the 131st General Assembly. Both passed twice out of this committee and out of the House 92-4 and 92-2 respectively. It serves as the next step in a long line of efforts this body has undertaken to battle the drug epidemic that is crippling our state.

This drug, dex, serves as the main ingredient in many cough syrups and cold medications.

At the recommended dose, dex is a safe and effective ingredient used in cough and cold medicines. At high doses, dextromethorphan is classified as a dissociative general anesthetic and hallucinogen, similar to the controlled substances ketamine and phencyclidine (PCP) and can be very dangerous. For this reason, many leading retailers across the State of Ohio already require an ID when purchasing any product containing dextromethorphan; however, not all do.

The need for this legislation was made clear by juvenile defense attorney and former State Representative Jeff Rezabek. Former Rep. Rezabek previously served as a Montgomery County Juvenile Court judge, a Dayton Municipal Court magistrate, a juvenile prosecutor and a youth advocate.

Mr. Rezabek's first encounter with dex abuse came early in his career, while representing a troubled client in Montgomery County's drug court. This very encounter is what alerted Mr. Rezabek to how something as simple and accessible as "over the counter" cold medicine, when put into the wrong hands, can be abused. The client would mix Robitussin with beer in order to get high and hallucinate. Higher-than-safe quantities of Robitussin (and the associated hallucinations) are so sought after by young people that a slang term has arisen: "Robo-tripping."

Dextromethorphan has been shown to be habit-forming and intoxicating. It is now an increasingly common drug of abuse, and it can cause a life-threatening overdose when a person — adult, teen, or child — consumes too much.

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House Bill 29 is a common sense piece of legislation. Right now, if you were to go to any of the major retailers and attempted to purchase any product containing dex, you would be required to show your ID to the clerk. Unfortunately, if you were to purchase this same type of medicine in a local convenience store or gas station, you would likely not be required to prove you are of age to purchase this product.

This bill would attempt to close that loophole and serve as the next step in our ongoing battle against drug abuse in our state.

In closing, the number of other states around the country that have passed legislation similar to HB 29 has grown each GA. The number is now fourteen. The intent of this bill is to make it as difficult as possible for medicines from making their way into the wrong hands and ultimately being abused - without removing it's "over-the-counter" status. I want to thank you for your time and your attention to this manner. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.