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Proponent Testimony, SB 55
Senate Judiciary Committee
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Chairman Eklund, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Thomas and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for allowing me to speak in support of Senate Bill 55. My name is Paul Dobson. I am the Wood County Prosecuting Attorney and a Past President of the Ohio Prosecuting Attorneys Association. I have served nearly all of my 25-year legal career as a prosecutor, and have been honored to serve as the elected official since 2009. I am also an Advisory Committee member to the Ohio Criminal Sentencing Commission.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Ohio reported that in 2015 just over 37,000 individuals were released from drug rehabilitation treatment. Of those, over 19,000 either dropped out, were unsuccessfully terminated, were incarcerated, or died. After considering other discharge categories, only 33% of those discharged that year had successfully completed their program. (SOURCE: Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS)). Opiate withdrawal symptoms can include low energy, irritability, anxiety, agitation, insomnia, hot and cold sweats, muscle aches and pains, abdominal cramping, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. These symptoms can last up to four weeks. (SOURCE: www.addictionsandrecovery.org/opioid-opiate-recovery.htm). "Protecting recovering addicts from relapse is especially important because many deadly overdoses occur during relapse. Because the user's body is no longer accustomed to the drug, it will be more sensitive. What would have been a normal dose for the user before withdrawal can become a deadly overdose in the weeks that follow." (SOURCE: "Stages of Opiate Withdrawal;" desertcoverrecovery.com; The Desert Cove Recovery Center, Scottsdale AZ).

In the face of this, addicts in recovery are the targets of drug traffickers. A few months ago, a Wood County jury convicted Samuel Haynes for attending group drug rehab sessions in order to target recovering addicts, befriend them and send them to his dealer. On April 22, 2016, Toledo 11 News reported that drug traffickers were targeting recovering addicts outside Toledo's Zepf Center. According to the article, recovering addicts said that traffickers would make contact with them and offer them "free" drugs in order to get them back under their addiction. In May of 2012, The Fix, an addiction and recovery website, reported that four drug dealers were arrested for trafficking outside of a rehab facility in Albany, New York. This year, my office will prosecute a homicide case on behalf of a young man who had been out of rehab for less than 24 hours before overdosing.

When I was approached by Representative Gavarone about ideas I had to fight the opiate crisis in Ohio, my mind immediately went to the comments of my stepson, who was then an addict in treatment, that he could leave the facility, walk a block in any direction and find someone willing to provide him heroin. That's why we discussed the idea that has become SB 55. My stepson, after months in recovery housing and outpatient treatment, did not survive his addiction. It has been my and my family's hope that lessons learned from Michael's life and death would result in better assistance for those seeking freedom from the entanglement of drug addiction. In addition to positive efforts that are being made around the state, I believe SB 55 offers that assistance in the form of a protective barrier around recovery housing.

This is a simple bill. It follows the same philosophy which led to an increase in penalties for trafficking in the presence of a juvenile or in the vicinity of a school. Our children stand at greater risk of falling into the trap of drug abuse and addiction. Those who target this vulnerable population must realize they face more substantial penalties for their conduct. In the same way, recovering addicts are an especially vulnerable population. Those who target them or target their places of sanctuary to capitalize on their vulnerability must also face harsher penalties.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of Senate Bill 55.