

Chairman Eklund, Vice Chairman Manning, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, my name is Tom Thompson. It is my pleasure to present testimony in support of House Concurrent Resolution 10.

HCR 10 represents a part of the ongoing battle in this state with the opioid epidemic. As we all know very well, Ohio, its people, its governments, and its resources, have suffered greatly over the past several years at the hands of the opiate epidemic. Many of us, in some way, shape, or form, have come in contact with individuals, or their family and friends, who have become addicted to opiates. These individuals come from every walk of life, including children and young adults. These individuals live in neighborhoods of varying demographic characteristics - low income, middle income, high income, and both urban and rural. This epidemic does not discriminate based on age, skin color, education attainment, income level, or neighborhood.

This epidemic comes not only at a great cost to addicted individuals, sometimes tragically at the cost of their lives, but also to families and friends. The strain that has been put on the foster care system in this state is significant and a direct result of parents being unable to care for their children due to their addiction. There has also been a great burden placed upon grandparents and other family members who find themselves caring for their grandchildren or children of families members, because the parents suffer from opiate addiction and cannot care for their own children. The very fabric of the family structure is under threat due to opiate addiction.

It is important to note that the opiate epidemic often times works hand in hand with other illegal, criminal activity such as human trafficking. Data shows that the vast majority of women who are trafficked have also been forced into opiate addiction so that they are compliant with their traffickers. A recent report from the Cincinnati Enquirer noted that more than 1,030 juveniles were victims of human trafficking between 2014 and 2016, and that another 4,309 youths were at risk of being trafficking victims. It is believed that these numbers are conservative and that the number of trafficking victims is much higher. Even babies and young children are being used as "mules" to traffic drugs across the border, a practice known as child renting. Unofficial reports are beginning to show that more money is being made in human trafficking than in drug trafficking, but they continue to work side by side.

Additionally, this epidemic has also greatly impacted businesses in this state, and put a great strain on this state's resources to treat this epidemic and combat its consequences. The loss of human productivity due to individuals not being able to work and contribute to society is alarming. As many of us have heard from local governments in our districts, the manpower and costs associated with fighting this epidemic is simply unsustainable in the long term.

In summary, and I know this is not news to any on this Committee, the opiate epidemic has and continues to pose a serious threat to the well being and vitality of this state, and many other parts of the country as well. The threat it poses comes in many forms, and its impacts are wide and varied. One thing all of these threats have in common is foreign drug cartels.

Foreign drug cartels, in particular from our southern border, control the majority of the flow of opioids and other illicit drugs into this country and into our state. The cartels control large swaths of territory to cultivate and produce these drugs and then transport them across the border. The cartels are also responsible for the proliferation of human trafficking in our country and state, again in particular along our southern border, by taking advantage of the strategic location of Mexico as a "bridge country" for migration flows towards the United States, and as stated above, this activity is part and parcel to their drug activity. The cartels are active within the borders of our country and state, conducting operations in furtherance of these activities that have such negative consequences to our society. In fact, the acting

administrator of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, Uttam Dhillon, recently declared the Mexican drug trafficking organizations as the biggest criminal threat to face our country today.

It is within this context that HCR 10 is being offered. HCR 10 urges the Federal Government to designate foreign drug cartels as foreign terrorist organizations, so that the government may use all appropriate means at their disposal to mitigate and eliminate their operations - operations that are responsible for the deaths of family members, friends, colleagues, and neighbors, and are placing huge and costly burdens on our state and country. Specifically, HCR 10 is urging the federal government to take this action under the provisions of Section 219 of the Immigration and nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1189), which authorizes the U.S. Secretary of State, in consultation with the Secretary of the Treasury and the Attorney General, to designate an organization as a foreign terrorist organization when certain criteria are met. These drug cartels meet such criteria in that they are foreign in nature, engage in or retain the capability and intent to engage in terrorism, and they threaten the security of United States citizens, as well as the national defense foreign relations, and economic interests of the country. By designating these drug cartels as foreign terrorist organizations, the Federal government would have at its disposal, if it so chooses, enhanced intelligence capabilities, the ability to freeze financial assets of the cartels, pursue those who provide material support to the cartels, and if necessary, enhanced military options.

Members of the Committee, the ongoing fight against the opiate epidemic is a multi front war. The Ohio General Assembly has and will continue to take actions, in partnership with Ohio's communities, in waging this battle through the treatment of those who are addicted, education efforts of our youth in order to preclude them from becoming addicted, and through ongoing law enforcement actions that are already in place. But I strongly believe that fighting this war at or near its source is crucial to ultimately declaring victory. I urge your support off this resolution as another step this legislature can take in winning the war against opiate addiction. Thank you and I would be happy to take any questions.