

Written Proponent Testimony for Senate Bill 30
House Behavioral Health and Recovery Supports Committee
May 6, 2021

Chair Carruthers, Vice Chair Pavliga, Ranking Member Boyd, and members of the House Behavioral Health and Recovery Supports Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written proponent testimony for Senate Bill 30. SB 30 would designate August 31 as “Ohio Overdose Awareness Day” and would require that state flags at public buildings be flown at half-staff. I would also like to thank Senator Dolan for introducing this legislation and bringing awareness to the issue.

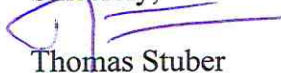
I am Thomas Stuber, President of the Ohio Alliance of Recovery Providers (OARP), an organization of 40 of the largest Addiction Treatment and Prevention Agencies throughout Ohio. I am also President of The LCADA Way, the largest Behavioral Health Agency specializing in Substance Use Disorder Treatment and Prevention in Lorain, Medina, and Erie Counties.

In January of this year, Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost’s Scientific Committee on Opioid Prevention and Education (SCOPE) announced startling new data findings: 67% of Ohio’s counties saw an increase in overdose deaths with Scioto (35.22 deaths per 100,000), Fayette (20.67 deaths per 100,000), and Franklin (19.43 deaths per 100,000) counties being the hardest hit in the second quarter of 2020 (the most recent data available from the Ohio Department of Health). The opioid epidemic continues to ravage our state and it is only compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. Overdose deaths in Ohio have surged. By November of last year, we surpassed the number of overdoses that we experienced in 2017, the worst year of the opioid epidemic. At the current rate of overdoses in Ohio, we will see a 20% increase in 2021. To make matters worse, there is currently not a sufficient behavioral health workforce to address the demand for treatment, something with which the members of OARP are very familiar.

Most of the attention on public health is presently aimed at COVID-19, and rightfully so, but we cannot afford to lose focus on a battle that has been raging for over a decade and will likely outlast the pandemic. Many people in difficult circumstances turn to self-medication, and when that is combined with the effects of isolation on addicts who may have become separated from their support network, their families and friends, their jobs and financial security, and other ongoing health issues, the problem only grows. Loneliness and isolation can be deadly for someone who is barely keeping their head above water.

OARP applauds Senator Dolan’s effort to keep overdoses in the public consciousness as it is a terrible reality for many Ohioans. Thank you for your attention to this matter, and if you have additional questions regarding my testimony, I can be reached at 440-669-0723.

Sincerely,



Thomas Stuber
President, Ohio Alliance of Recovery Providers