

Good Morning. Chair LaRe, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland, and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee. My name is Rebecca Cochran, and I am a resident of Clermont County, Ohio. Before I begin, I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify here today in support of House Bill 356.

There's a saying: "ignorance is bliss." Yet, our ignorance pertaining to this current drug crisis has been anything but blissful.

In January 2019 my brother, Clay Loadman, sat in my car crying while telling me he had become addicted to pain killers. As a practicing family law attorney, I see the turmoil substance abuse causes families daily, but I never thought my family would be touched by this horrible disease. How blissfully ignorant I was.

When I trace the moment everything fell apart it comes back to one event. Clay's job required him to be harnessed and elevated atop buildings. One day he injured his shoulder and was prescribed Percocet for the pain. While I was not present to witness the conversation Clay had with the physician, I have a strong inclination that the implications of taking such a drug were not explained.

At the height of his addiction, he told me he was taking several pills several times a day. When Clay could no longer afford the street value of Percocet, he was turned on to a cheaper alternative: heroin.

Hours after my brother's confession, my mother was on the phone trying to find him a treatment facility. Clay had great insurance through the union, although none of that mattered because all the local facilities were either booked up or did not accept his insurance. Clay ultimately participated in a 30-day in-treatment stay in South Florida. After completion, he transitioned to an intensive outpatient program where he suffered his first relapse. After that, it was a series of moving him from one facility to the next, bringing him home, then finding another place for him to go. Wash. Rinse. Repeat.

Soon we exhausted all possibilities in Florida and needed another option. So, we tried California. I agreed to travel with him to make sure he made it. After we landed in LAX, I walked alongside him as we went to the baggage claim. Before I left him that night, I hugged him and said, "This time is going to work. I know it is." I watched as he was driven away. That was the last time I saw my brother alive. My brother was 25 years old when he died. He was a homeowner, a hard worker, a productive member of society, and a father to an 8-year-old little girl. Everything a blissfully ignorant person would somehow believe made him less susceptible to drug addiction.

To this day, I cannot move past the anger stage of grief. I am angry at the doctor who prescribed my brother Percocet for what was an acute injury. I am angry that Ohio is not currently equipped to take care of their own. My brother's issues started here. He should have never needed to be shipped across the country. What sending our loved ones away does is give them false hope. It makes it so their sober support system is not readily available to them once they leave their facility. We need the ability to treat our loved ones in an environment close to home so they can gather a local support system that will be available to them once they attempt to return to their lives sober.

This bill would allow individuals suffering from substance abuse to seek rehabilitation in lieu of incarceration. It increases the penalty for trafficking illegal and addictive substances, while also offering

those susceptible to addiction a way out. It will establish restitution work programs to help individuals gain skills necessary to be employed legitimately outside of the drug trade.

This bill places limitations on opiate prescriptions to treat acute pain. It requires prescribers to evaluate a patient for signs of drug abuse and addiction. Prescribers will now be held accountable if they irresponsibly over-prescribe opiates to individuals in our communities.

I would consider the adoption of this bill to be a major step in the right direction because it will impact a large majority of people who suffer from substance abuse. Although my brother avoided incarceration, and a portion of this bill would not apply to an individual like him, this bill is an impressive piece of legislation. The support of this bill shows Ohioans that the politicians we voted for are actively working on an actual solution. This is not just a half-baked attempt to put a small band-aid over a bleeding wound.

Again, I thank you all for giving me this opportunity to speak about my family's ongoing battle. Thank you, Representative Adam Bird for listening and reaching out to my family. Thank you, all the other co-sponsors, for putting so much effort into this bill. To all in this room with the ability to vote for this bill: I hope you strongly consider placing your support behind this effort.