

House Criminal Justice Committee
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Proponent Testimony
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Chairman LaRe, Vice Chair White, Ranking Member Leland, and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of House Bill 456. This bill would decriminalize the use and possession of drug testing strips that determine the presence of fentanyl.

Fentanyl is a potent synthetic opioid that officials now regularly discover hidden in other drugs, both legal and illegal. According to the Ohio Department of Health, in 2020, fentanyl played a role in an overwhelming 81% of overdose deaths. This is up from 71% in of overdose deaths in 2017. Indeed, the discovered presence of fentanyl continues to steadily increase.

Earlier this year, two Ohio State University students lost their lives as a result of a fentanyl overdose. The fentanyl that killed the students was discovered to have been laced in Adderall pills. In her sponsor testimony, Representative Boggs told the story of another college student from the Columbus area who fatally overdosed on fentanyl when taking an herbal supplement. Test strips are a life-saving tool to prevent unnecessary deaths like these, and should not be criminalized under Ohio law.

Current law recognizes fentanyl test strips as drug paraphernalia, the use and possession of which is a misdemeanor of the fourth degree. Considering the increased prevalence of fentanyl, and the demonstrated threat that it poses, it is wise of us to remove fentanyl test strips from the list of illegal drug paraphernalia. By decriminalizing the possession of fentanyl test strips, HB 456 can help to stem the tide of overdoses caused by hidden fentanyl, while also preserving available sources of Naloxone and other drugs used to counteract overdoses. In Ohio, a single fentanyl test strip typically costs somewhere around one dollar. By contrast, a Naloxone kit can cost upwards of \$100 for uninsured individuals. Eliminating a barrier for a safety tool which is not only preemptive in nature, but is also significantly more affordable than an alternative, is both fiscally responsible and good public policy.

The seriousness of the opioid epidemic cannot be overstated. According to recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Ohio has the fourth highest overdose death rate in the nation at 47.2%. These statistics call for urgent action to save the lives of Ohioans. House Bill 456 would take a necessary step in prioritizing life.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you again for allowing me to offer written proponent testimony on House Bill 456. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions about our support for this legislation.