



*HB 699, Proponent Testimony
November 30th, 2022*

Chairman LaRe, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland, and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Minister Blyth Barnow. I am here to offer proponent testimony for HB 699. I am the founder of HEAL Ohio, an organization bringing clergy together with harm reduction leaders in order to save lives across the state of Ohio. I also helped found the national Harm Reduction and Overdose Prevention ministry with the United Church of Christ and I lead the Harm Reduction and Overdose Prevention ministry for the Heartland Conference which includes Ohio, West Virginia, and Northern Kentucky.

We are deeply grateful for the thoughtful work that has been put into HB 699 and are thrilled to see that meaningful expansion of the Good Samaritan legislation has been included in the subbill version of HB 699.

In 2020 Ohio lost more people to overdose deaths than ever before. Without amendments to our Good Samaritan policy, Ohioans will continue to die from preventable overdose deaths because those around them fear being punished for calling for help. In the midst of this ongoing overdose crisis no one should be penalized for saving a life.

We are particularly thrilled to see Good Samaritan protection being expanded to those on community control or post release-control. Those under community control and post release-control need this legislation the most, as they are the most fearful of calling authorities. Also, people released from prison and jail are at heightened risk of overdose after release. We know that the highest increase of overdose death rates in Ohio are among Black men. However, Black men are overrepresented in Ohio's carceral system and so are underrepresented in protection from the Good Samaritan policy. Which leads to disproportionate losses and unnecessary deaths. This must change. Any restrictions on Good Samaritan policy will result in the loss of lives that could be saved. We are here to save every life.

Thank you for working to make Ohio a true Good Samaritan State by protecting those who save lives by responding to overdoses. We ask you to keep House Bill 699 moving quickly and to vote yes to saving lives.

Sincerely,
Minister Blyth Barnow
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