



SB 288

Proponent Testimony

December 8th, 2022

Chairman LaRe, Vice Chair White, 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 SB 288. I am the Director 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 SB 288 and are thrilled to see that meaningful expansion of the Good Samaritan legislation has been included.

In 2004 I lost someone I love to an accidental overdose. A mutual friend was with him the night he overdosed, but left the scene. I'm ashamed to say that for over a decade I hated that person. However, I know now that our friend wasn't hard hearted, cruel, or selfish. They were just scared. Scared that calling for help would mean incarceration, which meant losing the job that supported their family and losing custody of their child. They were caught between impossible choices and did the best they could, I truly believe that now.

I no longer hold hatred in my heart for that friend, only compassion and a fierce determination to ensure that nobody else loses someone they love to a preventable death. I know that our state needs a "good" Good Samaritan law in order to prevent grief like mine. Our current legislation is too limited to be effective. I hear it over and over again when working alongside people who use drugs and service providers.

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 glad 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 SB 288 moving quickly and to vote yes to saving lives.

Sincerely,
Minister Blyth Barnow
Director, HEAL Ohio
MinisterBlyth@healoh.org