

## **Senator Gavarone Sponsor Testimony**

### **Senate Resolution 243**

**2/15/22**

Chairman Hoagland, Vice Chair Johnson and Ranking Member Thomas, thank you for allowing our testimony on Senate Resolution 243.

Senate Resolution 243 urges the Federal Government to increase efforts to protect our border in order to combat drug and human smuggling in the United States. These crimes are committed on a daily basis at our borders, and its effects have negatively affected Ohioans.

In fiscal year 2021, United States Customs and Border Protection seized more than 319,000 pounds of marijuana, 109,000 pounds of methamphetamine, 97,000 pounds of cocaine, 11,000 pounds of fentanyl, and 5,400 pounds of heroin at our borders. Drugs are commonly trafficked into the United States through a variety of routes, including overland across the Southwest border, as well as through online orders that are shipped by international mail and express consignment services.

In 2020, illicit fentanyl or fentanyl analogs contributed to 81% of overdose deaths in Ohio, while deaths related to fentanyl increased 32%. In the same year, Ohio hit a record death rate from opioid overdoses in the previous 10-year period. Drugs brought into the United State end up in Ohio and have tragically taken the lives of thousands of Ohioans.

In addition, the act of human smuggling, which deliberately evades immigration laws, is a daily occurrence at the southwest

border. Individuals who are smuggled into the United States may be involved in transnational criminal organization operations or may be forced into human trafficking situations. Ohio currently ranks as one of the ten worst states for human trafficking in the United States.

The situation with our borders has resulted in the Federal Government requesting our state's assistance. Last year, Governor DeWine assigned over 100 members of the Ohio National Guard to support United States Customs and Border Protection. This was in addition to the assignment of troopers from the Ohio State Highway Patrol to travel to Texas at the request of Texas Governor Greg Abbott to support local law enforcement with border surveillance.

To be clear Mr. Chairman, the Biden Administration's handling of the border has been a complete disaster. Illegal immigrants are flooding across the border, but somehow, we are at a 26-year low in deportations, according to the annual report by Immigration and Customs Enforcement. I would be happy to share that report with your office, Mr. Chairman. I am all for legal immigration, but quite frankly, I believe those who try to cheat the system should not be rewarded, but rather face the consequences of their actions.

We must demand better of the federal government. An open border is not a good thing for public safety and that is why I imagine this legislation was sent to your committee.

The act of drug and human smuggling can exacerbate the opioid and human trafficking crises that our state is already fighting to end. The General Assembly and our statewide leaders have passed legislation and taken initiative to combat these crises. We are urging the Federal Government to increase their focus on border security to limit the effects of smuggling and help Ohioans avoid drug addiction and involvement in human trafficking, and instead refocus our resources to support our state and residents.

Chair Hoagland, thank you for allowing us to talk about this important issue for Ohio and our nation. I urge a committee vote in favor of reporting this resolution.