

HB 230

Opponent Testimony

Evan M. Rooney

October 23rd, 2023

Dear Chairman Ghanbari, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the House Homeland Security Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer opponent testimony for House Bill 230.

My name is Evan Rooney and I am a person who is in recovery from substance use disorder and a certified peer recovery supporter for the state of Ohio. I was dependent upon heroin and crack cocaine for 6 years. I've witnessed first-hand the detrimental effects of when a drug dealer is taken in to custody. People who use drugs begin searching elsewhere in an attempt to find a new supplier thus causing an increase in overdose fatalities. There have been several studies completed that have proven when a drug dealer is arrested and a safe supply of drugs is taken out of the community, people who use drugs – those who you are trying to help, begin dying. New dealers begin selling a tainted drug supply with fentanyl, xylazine or other deadly substances) and people who use drugs are having to purchase the drugs from a dealer they do not trust and use them not knowing what they are tainted with.

Please keep in mind that substance use disorder is a disease. As someone who has first-hand experience with it, I can tell you that is an absolute fact. Once the drug is in our body then the dependency becomes almost instant. It doesn't matter what or who gets in the way, we will make sure we get what we need by whatever means possible. Including purchasing drugs from a person who we have never met before and do not trust.

Imposing a mandatory 5 year sentence for those found guilty of selling drugs to someone who overdoses and increasing the sentence for those found guilty of drug trafficking will not help to get fentanyl off the streets. The current punishments for those mentioned above are not helping. The attempt to remove heroin from the streets caused a new, more potent substance to emerge (fentanyl) and now the attempt to remove fentanyl from the streets is the main reason why xylazine and other harmful and potent substances are now emerging. That, in and of itself, is the true definition on the failed war on drugs.

I have lost several friends to overdose along my journey from substance use disorder to recovery and I won't let their deaths be in vain. Imposing harsher sentences does nothing but cause fear. Fear of calling for help when a person who uses drugs overdoses and fear of retaliation.

Speaking as someone with lived experience and a passion for all things harm reduction, this bill will continue to contribute to the already failed war on drugs. I urge you not to move forward

with this legislation. Overdose fatalities will increase and those who deserve care and compassion will not even have the option to attempt recovery as they will have lost their life.

I oppose this bill and again I urge you to not move forward with this harmful piece of legislation. Thank you for taking the time to review my written testimony.

Sincerely,

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