

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. I oppose HB 230 because it creates a mandatory five-year prison sentence for individuals found to be responsible for a fentanyl-related overdose death and boosts penalties for drug trafficking charges. In my work in drug prevention, I have learned that alleged "dealers" prosecuted for drug-induced homicide are often actually a friend or family member of the victim, who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. People who use drugs, but do not deal drugs, are being imprisoned for homicide they did not commit. Additionally, increased penalties do not serve as a deterrent and do not reduce overdose deaths. Analyses of drug-induced homicide practices in jurisdictions in New Jersey, Tennessee, North Carolina, Illinois, Louisiana, and New York, found that despite dramatic growth in drug-induced homicide prosecutions, all of the jurisdictions experienced significant increases in overdose deaths, ranging from 7.6% to 20.1% in a single year. Ohio is third in the country for Drug Induced Homicide prosecutions and fifth in the country for overdose fatalities, showing that harsher prosecution does not reduce death. It's time for Ohio legislators to join the rest of the developed world in treating drug use and overdose death as a public health crisis, not as a crime.