



Hamilton County Heroin Coalition Task Force



Ohio Senate Transportation Committee November 20, 2024 Proponent Testimony on HB194

Chairwoman Kunze, Vice Chair Reineke, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the Senate Transportation Committee my name is Tom Fallon and I have served as a police officer for over 36 years and I am the Legislative Chair for the Ohio Task Force Commanders Association. Over the past nine plus years, I have had the honor of serving as the Commander of the Hamilton County Heroin Task Force and Quick Response Team. Tasked with responding to the overwhelming crisis of overdose deaths in Hamilton County between 2013 and 2015, I was entrusted by the Hamilton County Association of Chiefs of Police to establish a task force aimed at investigating overdose deaths back to the supplier, holding drug dealers accountable for the loss of lives within our community. To date, we have investigated over 1,800 overdose deaths.

I also oversee the Hamilton County Quick Response Team, a groundbreaking initiative where law enforcement officers collaborate with trained peer navigators to offer a range of community-based services, addressing issues such as substance use, mental health, homelessness, and other needs-based services. I am proud to report a 16% reduction in overdose/poisoning deaths in Hamilton County from 2021 to 2022, and a 9% decrease from 2022 to 2023, to date in 2024 we are showing a 28% decrease from 2023, a testament to our comprehensive community-based response.

Today, I stand before you in strong support of HB194. For too long, Ohio has borne the brunt of the national overdose death crisis. According to the Ohio Department of Health, our state witnessed a staggering increase in unintentional overdose deaths, rising from 1,914 lives lost in 2012 to 5,018 lives taken in 2022—an alarming 262% increase. In 2021, fentanyl played a pivotal role in 80% of Ohio's unintentional drug overdose deaths. While the early stages of the epidemic saw fentanyl primarily introduced into the heroin drug supply, more recent trends indicate its prevalence in various recreational drug sources. This shift has led to an alarming doubling of unintentional drug overdose deaths in Ohio's Black Non-Hispanic and Hispanic populations from 2016 to 2021.

Over the past several years, our Ohio drug task forces have seen large reductions in grant funding. When the Ohio Drug Law Enforcement fund legislation was enacted, there were fewer task forces vying for funding. This funding was also negatively affected during the COVID era and has been slow to bounce back. The rising cost of both equipment and salaries has affected task forces and has resulted in task forces doing more with less.

House Bill 194 will provide a stable funding source that will greatly assist Ohio's drug enforcement task forces in executing their mission, as directed by the communities they serve, while removing a barrier of inconsistent funding sources.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on this issue, and I am happy to take any questions.