



Representative Cindy Abrams

State Representative for the 29th House District

Representative Phil Plummer

State Representative for the 39th House District

Chairman Thomas Vice Chair Mathews, Ranking Member Isaacsohn, and members of the House Judiciary Committee, thank you for giving us the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 88.

To give some background, two years ago, I was invited by Butler County Sheriff Richard Jones to travel to the Arizona southern border to meet Cochise County Sheriff Dannels and his team. As a former city of Cincinnati Police Officer and, at the time, Chair of the House Criminal Justice Committee, I was honored to be invited and to witness the border crisis firsthand.

We met Sheriff Dannels and his team where they gave us an overview of what is happening every single day. The statistics are staggering. Today, at least 12 Ohioans will die of fentanyl poisoning. 190 Americans will die today of fentanyl poisoning, that is the equivalent of a 737 aircraft's capacity. Two milligrams of fentanyl is considered to be a lethal dose. This is about the size of the tip of a pencil.

The Cochise County Sheriff's Department and the US Border Patrol are on the front lines of this national dilemma. We drove to the border and saw the unfinished wall, with concertina wire near the port of entry. We continued down the road, and over the mountain, where the large border wall ended. We then saw a small, barbed wire fence, the wide-open land. I saw firsthand miles and miles on our southern border where there are NO walls or fences, just wide-open land.

The Southeastern Arizona Border Region Enforcement Team, also known as the SABRE Team, took us to a place on the top of a mountain where we watched the cartel and saw them watching us. I saw the cartel preparing numerous people dressed in full camouflage, many times armed, carrying backpacks full of as much fentanyl, cocaine, and methamphetamine they could carry. The fentanyl is often in pill form and comes over from China. Despite being counterfeit, they look like an actual Adderall or Xanax pill. It is estimated that 60% of counterfeit prescription pills may have a potentially lethal dose of fentanyl.

Sadly, these drugs and dangerous cartel criminals are coming into our great country. My friend Mark Murphy joined us on the trip. His 21-year-old daughter, Lizzie, took what she thought was a Xanax and died of fentanyl poisoning. He said as parents, we have to imagine this happening to our own children. We must educate our kids about this drug epidemic, talk to them, and be brutally honest. You will hear directly from Mark during proponent testimony.

The cartels are recruiting Americans to pick up these dangerous criminals from the roadside after they cross the border. The cartels pay anywhere from \$3,000 to \$20,000 a person to drive them to Phoenix, where they are then sent to many states, including Ohio.

Multiple high-speed pursuits occur daily in Cochise County, as the cartels tell the smugglers not to stop for the police. Posted signs read: Smuggle + Flee = Jail. We got into a 40-mile-long pursuit where six undocumented aliens jumped out of the bed of a pickup truck. Thankfully, the Border Patrol caught them. The pickup truck driver was a young American male in his twenties. He had his American girlfriend with him who was also in her twenties. They had three more undocumented aliens in the truck when we caught them. During the pursuit, the driver of the pick-up truck had NO regard for human life as they crossed the center line multiple times, into oncoming traffic, at a high rate of speed.

I also met with the prosecutor's office in Arizona and heard their feedback about what is and is not working in their state. Some of the advice they gave was that we need to treat every state as a border state. After I returned home, I knew I had to take legislative action. From there, we began drafting the legislation we are here to talk about today.

It is important to note that this bill is NOT about immigration. This NOT about people that want to come here legally, to pursue the American Dream. We are not talking about the people that jump the wall or get caught being smuggled in at the ports of entry. These are criminals that smuggle these dangerous drugs into our country with no regard for human life. This bill addresses two prominent crises right here in Ohio – drug and human trafficking.

I would like to take a moment to highlight a few key provisions of the bill.

First, this legislation will increase drug trafficking penalties for cocaine, fentanyl, heroin, and methamphetamine.

Second, this bill will expand the definition of human trafficking to combat the dangerous criminals bringing these drugs into our great state.

Third, the bill establishes a specification, a mandatory prison term of 5 years if an individual is convicted or pleads guilty of a fentanyl related death.

Next, the bill requires that death certificates list fentanyl poisoning as a cause of death if a lethal amount was found in a person's body and it contributed to their cause of death.

The bill also requires that students from kindergarten through graduate school are receiving education on the dangers of fentanyl and makes August as Fentanyl Poisoning Awareness Month.

Last General Assembly, House Bill 230 passed out of the House Homeland Security with a vote of 11-1 and on the House Floor with a vote of 80-13. Ohio cannot waste any more time when our constituents are continuing to die of fentanyl poisoning.

Our message is clear: don't come to Ohio if you want to traffic illegal drugs or humans. In the coming weeks, you will hear from the experts, our first responders and prosecutors – the boots on the ground, that face this crisis every single day. You will also hear from families that have lost loved ones to fentanyl poisoning and the opioid epidemic. We are looking forward to continuing to work with our law enforcement and prosecutors as well as this committee on this important legislation to keep our communities safe. Thank you again for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony today. I would now like to turn it over to Representative Plummer to speak further on the bill.