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Ohio House Judiciary Committee

March 19, 2025

HB 88 Drugs/Human Trafficking

Chair Thomas, Vice-Chair Mathews, Ranking Member Isaacsohn, and members of the Ohio House Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to address you today. My name is Jonathan Sopczak, and I am here today to offer proponent testimony on House Bill 88 on behalf of the Fraternal Order of Police of Ohio.

I have been a law enforcement officer with the Dayton Police Department for 17 years and have maintained the rank of sergeant for the past 6 years. I currently supervise the Dayton Police Special Investigations Bureau, which focuses on narcotics trafficking and human trafficking investigations and manages the Task Force officers assigned to our federal law enforcement partners. Previously, I supervised our law enforcement-led substance abuse intervention programs. In this role, I witnessed firsthand the devastating effects fentanyl had on my community. I was also able to see the impact of our work, as hope was restored to many families when treatment options became available. For context, around 2017, the City of Dayton became the epicenter for fatal fentanyl overdoses, which brought national media attention to our region. Unfortunately, Dayton is not alone in this regard. This devastation continues to affect Ohio communities, their citizens, and first responders.

Fentanyl has increasingly been found in many of the illegal drugs that flood our communities. This has contributed to the Dayton Police Department forming a united front with the Montgomery County Department of Public Health. Through our relationship, we bring awareness to this health emergency, along with the importance of harm reduction initiatives that include training and distribution of Narcan and fentanyl test strips.

The FOP of Ohio strongly supports increasing the penalties for those who traffic drugs in our communities. Far too often, the justice system fails its citizens by imposing light sentences in relation to drugs. Make no mistakes: the individuals who traffic drugs in our communities are waging war against our citizens—the abuse of these substances tears at the very fabric of family and community. We should hold the pushers of these substances to the highest level of accountability, and I believe this bill does so.

The educational aspect of this bill cannot be overlooked, as the young minds that will shape our future should be aware of the dangers associated with these illicit drugs. I have had the unfortunate experience of listening to grieving mothers whose children suffered a fatal overdose. Unknowingly, they took what they believed to be a prescription pill and lost their life to fentanyl. With proper education and awareness instilled in our youth, many of these tragedies could have been avoided. The prevalence of this poison being leached into so many unsuspecting areas within our community leaves our citizens gambling with their lives, and they don't even know it.

The FOP of Ohio strongly supports building a comprehensive strategy to combat the ongoing drug crisis in our state. Enforcement, prevention, and drug treatment need to work hand in hand to be effective. The provisions in this bill support this strategy and will go a long way to combating drug trafficking and lowering the fatal overdoses experienced in this state.

I appreciate the opportunity to share some of my thoughts. These matters have had a profound impact on me through my work with our citizens. I am passionate about the impacts we can have if we approach these issues from the right place. Thank you again, and I would be happy to try and answer any questions you have.