



Ohio Task Force Commanders Association
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Ohio House Judiciary Committee

March 19, 2025

Testimony on HB88

Chair Thomas, Vice Chair Mathews, Ranking Member Isaacsohn, and esteemed Members of the House Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 88 on behalf of the Ohio Task Force Commanders Association.

I retired at the end of 2024 after nine- and one-half years serving as the Commander of the Hamilton County Heroin Task Force and Quick Response Team. In 2015, the Hamilton County Association of Chiefs of Police entrusted me with establishing a task force dedicated to tracing overdose deaths back to their suppliers and holding drug dealers accountable for the lives lost in our community.

Additionally, I created and led the Hamilton County Quick Response Team, a pioneering initiative where law enforcement officers collaborate with trained navigators to provide community-based services. These services address substance use, mental health, homelessness, and other critical needs. As a result of our law enforcement programming combined with a comprehensive community-based response, Hamilton County experienced a 30% reduction in overdose deaths from 2023 to 2024, following a 9% decrease from 2022 to 2023. This balanced strategy—holding drug dealers accountable for the harm they cause while providing essential services to those in need—reflects the evolving police mandate from the communities we serve.

Today, I stand before you in strong support of HB88. Ohio has been the epicenter of the national overdose death crisis. According to the Ohio Department of Health, Ohio lost 1,914 people to unintentional overdose deaths in 2012. Despite minor decreases in overdose deaths over the past two years, Ohio lost 4,452 people to unintentional drug overdoses in 2023—a staggering 232% increase from 2012. In 2023, fentanyl was involved in 78% of Ohio unintentional drug overdose deaths, and Ohio saw the number of drug overdose deaths involving cocaine increased 7%, and deaths involving benzodiazepines increased 4%. Even with some decreases statewide, make no mistake, Ohio is still in the midst of an evolving overdose death crisis.

The Ohio Task Force Commanders Association and I strongly support the provisions of this bill involving the increased penalties for drug trafficking related to heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine and fentanyl. While the proposed five-year mandatory sentence for individuals convicted in fentanyl-related deaths is a step in the right direction, it remains significantly lower than federal sentencing standards. Increasing this penalty would better reflect the severity of the crisis and its devastating impact on Ohio communities. This five-year mandatory sentence allows this statute to follow along with ORC 2925.02 Corrupting another with Drugs, which carries a minimum sentence of one year, a statute many of our task force use regularly on non-fatal overdose investigations.

Many of our Ohio Drug Task Forces are tasked with investigations that concern human trafficking. The illegal drug trade and human trafficking are deeply interconnected, with criminal networks operating across U.S. borders and directly impacting Ohio. Strengthening trafficking laws, as proposed in this bill, is essential to dismantling these operations and protecting victims. The expansion of the definition of human trafficking in this bill as well as the new provision of “participating in an organization or operation for trafficking in persons” and the mandatory sentence will assist our investigators and prosecutors working these cases with another tool on the tool belt to hold human traffickers accountable with appropriate minimum sentencing.

Respectfully Submitted,

Tom Fallon
Legislative Chair
Ohio Task Force Commanders Association