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November 12, 2025

Interested Party Testimony on HB 88

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Chairman Thomas, Vice-Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Synenberg, and members of the House Judiciary Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on House Bill 88. On behalf of Unison Health, a trusted provider of behavioral health, substance use treatment, and integrated healthcare services throughout Northwest Ohio, we appreciate the chance to share our perspective on this legislation.

We commend the committee for its commitment to addressing the issues of drug trafficking, human trafficking, and fentanyl-related crimes in Ohio. These crises have had a devastating impact on families and communities throughout our state, and we share the goal of reducing harm and improving safety.

As a service provider and community resource, we have concerns about certain aspects of HB 88 that emphasize extended criminal penalties. While we understand the intention to strengthen public safety, we respectfully encourage the committee to consider how these measures may affect individuals living with addiction and mental illness. Under HB 88, increased penalties would lead to mandatory prison sentences instead of opting for court-ordered treatment to address addiction issues.

We would also like to highlight the importance of the bill's provisions that support fentanyl abuse prevention education in schools and higher education institutions. This initiative is essential for protecting our youth and raising awareness about the dangers of fentanyl-related addiction and overdose. By fostering open discussions about addiction and overdose, we can reduce stigma and create a supportive environment, ultimately aiming to lessen fentanyl-related harm in our communities.

Once again, we appreciate the legislature's efforts to recognize the harmful effects of drug use in the state. We urge you to consider methods that prioritize treatment and recovery instead of incarceration. Thank you for your service and for considering our input.