

## Opposition Testimony to House Bill 88

Ohio House Criminal Justice Committee

November 12, 2025

Chair Thomas, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Synenberg and members of the House Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written opponent testimony on HB 88.

My name is Dr. Dinah Applewhite, MD and I am an addiction medicine specialist. Throughout my career, in both Massachusetts and now Northeast Ohio, I've worked with individuals with severe substance use disorder, including cocaine use disorder and opioid use disorder. I have served as the medical director of two treatment programs. Additionally, I conduct research on improving the health of people with substance use disorder, most recent as an Assistant Professor at Harvard.

From a clinical standpoint, this legislation misunderstands what addiction is. It is a chronic, relapsing brain disease. Decades of research, and decades of Ohio's own experience, tell us that the threat of incarceration does not reduce substance use. To addiction medicine specialists, this comes as no surprise: Substance use is defined by ongoing use *despite negative consequences*. HB 88 treats a public health crisis as a criminal issue. This has never been shown to be effective.

Given that individuals with severe substance use disorder frequently possess illicit substances (some of which may be unintentionally contaminated with fentanyl), House Bill 88 will impact people with substance use disorder in profoundly negative ways. It will drive people away from treatment out of fear of prosecution. It will increase rates of felony convictions, which will not only make it harder for individuals to re-integrate into communities, but will also increase rates of overdose death.

This law will cost taxpayers more than \$60M annually on imprisoning people, rather than investing valuable tax dollars on saving lives through evidence-based care. I urge the committee to reject this bill and instead invest in what works: prevention, treatment, recovery housing, and mental health services. Addiction is a disease. It deserves a medical response, not a criminal one.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to the people of Ohio.

Dr. Dinah Applewhite, MD