

Ohio House Public Safety Committee

March 4, 2025

Proponent Testimony on Amendment

Chair Abrams, Vice Chair Miller, Ranking Member Thomas, and Esteemed Members of the House Public Safety Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on this budget amendment. My name is Tom Fallon, and I am a retired law enforcement officer with 35 years of service in Ohio. I retired at the end of 2024 after spending over nine and a half years as the Commander of the Hamilton County Heroin Task Force and Quick Response Team (QRT). I now serve as the Executive Director of the Ohio Deflection (QRT) Association and the Legislative Chair for the Ohio Task Force Commanders Association.

In response to the overwhelming crisis of overdose deaths in Hamilton County between 2013 and 2015, I was entrusted by the Hamilton County Association of Chiefs of Police to establish a task force that would investigate overdose deaths, tracing them back to the suppliers and holding drug dealers accountable.

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.

Strong Support for This Amendment

I stand before you today in strong support of this amendment. As you may know, QRT/Deflection began in Hamilton County and Lucas County in 2015. Initially, QRT/Deflection focused on post-overdose response, aiming to connect individuals to treatment by bringing services directly to their doorsteps. Since then, QRT/Deflection has evolved to assist not only individuals with substance use disorders but also those facing mental health challenges, homelessness, and other social needs.

QRT/Deflection programs have expanded statewide, significantly growing under then-Attorney General Mike DeWine in 2017, when \$3 million in seed funding was allocated to establish and expand teams. Currently, Ohio has 80 QRT/Deflection Teams, with 26 of Ohio's Drug Task Forces embedding QRT/Deflection teams or have established partnerships with them.

As a Task Force Commander, I spent nearly four years serving as a boots-on-the-ground QRT/Deflection officer one day a week. I can personally attest that QRT/Deflection teams save lives and, in Hamilton County, have strengthened police-community relations—one home visit at a time.

Impact and Cost Savings

Data collected by Ohio's QRT/Deflection teams, through our original and primary data partner Cordata, demonstrates the profound impact of QRT/Deflection efforts. In 2024 alone, QRT teams:

- Documented over 40,000 interactions and served 21,000 individuals through outreach, overdose response, follow-ups, and treatment referrals.

- Connected individuals to a wide range of services, including housing, addiction treatment, assessments, and peer recovery support.
- Provided services across the state, including Ohio's rural and Appalachian communities.

Beyond these life-saving efforts, QRT/ Deflection teams have generated substantial cost savings for Medicaid. A study in Montgomery County, Ohio, found that individuals who engaged with the QRT experienced significant reductions in hospital-related costs annually. Specifically:

- Clients with one QRT interaction saved an average of \$17,000
- Clients with two QRT interactions saved \$31,000
- Clients with three or more QRT interactions saved \$42,000

Given that 65% of QRT clients are on Medicaid, these interventions translate to a minimum annual savings of over \$232 million for clients with one QRT interaction and over half a billion dollars for those with three or more interactions.

Criminal Justice Impact

QRT/ Deflection teams also play a significant role in reducing criminal justice involvement. According to the Montgomery County study from our Cordata data, QRT engagement led to:

- A reduction in non-drug-related arrests
- A decline in new violent crime charges among QRT clients.
- Fewer overall interactions with the criminal justice system.

The evidence is clear—QRT and Deflection programs save lives, strengthen communities, reduce healthcare costs, and ease burdens on the criminal justice system. With several years of valuable data from Ohio QRT/deflection teams in the Cordata system, we can continuously evaluate and refine these programs to meet the specific needs of each community they serve. Expanding and supporting these initiatives is both a fiscally responsible and socially impactful decision for Ohio.

I urge you to support this amendment and continue investing in these life-saving programs.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Tom Fallon