

Testimony Prepared for Ohio Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee

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By Commander Scott Duff

South-Central Ohio Major Crimes Unit/Project Fort

Lancaster, Ohio

Hello and thank you. Chairman Schaffer, Vice Chairman Koehler, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and all the members of the Committee. Thank you for all you do for Ohio, and thank you for letting me speak today.

My name is Scott Duff, and I am the Commander of the South-Central Ohio Major Crimes Unit located in Lancaster Ohio. I am also the Director of the Fairfield County Overdose Response Team, also known as Project Fort. The Major Crimes Unit was founded in the fall of 2000 by the Sheriffs, Police Chiefs, and Prosecutors in Fairfield and Hocking Counties. These agency heads understood that criminals and crime was not confined to any one geographical area and believed that through professional collaboration they could more effectively and efficiently address the problem of drug trafficking and substance use at the local level.

Project Fort sits within the Major Crimes Unit and is a law enforcement led deflection team. Our mission at Project Fort is to reduce the number of accidental overdoses and to eliminate all overdose deaths. Project Fort started as an idea in 2016-2017, became a reality in 2018. Today, in 2025 Project Fort has become one of the leading Deflection Teams not only in the state, but in the country. Our main mission is to connect those who suffer from substance abuse disorders to treatment and recovery options that exist in Fairfield County, and when required, we connect them outside of Fairfield County. We try to do that outside of the criminal justice system, if that is possible. Trust me, it isn't always possible. Project Fort spends a lot of time doing jail visits. The bottom line is that we are trying to put people in a position to succeed. To earn a GED, to rent that apartment, to buy that car. To help people stay clean and sober and live a productive life. Project Fort, through the Major Crimes Unit, has partnered with over 30 Community partners in Fairfield County, including our ADAMH Board, many of our treatment providers, Job and Family Services, and of course, our law enforcement partners, including the Fairfield County Sheriff's Office and the Lancaster Police Department.

I am going to tell you a quick story about Brandon Cox. When I met Brandon 7 years ago, he had overdosed several times. He was on a meth pipe and also used opiates. When he finally got sober, he had a desire to become a first responder. He ran into barrier after barrier, but he was determined. He made it into fire school, and became a firefighter graduating first in his class. He then went to medic school and graduated first in his class. Now, he is a full-time firefighter and paramedic for the City of Lancaster.

Project Fort is 100% grant funded. We know that grant dollars are not a long-term solution. We have connected over 400 people to treatment and recovery options in Fairfield County since we started Project Fort. We are part of Drug Court. We are also part of the Veterans Court. Project Fort has a seat at the table. We are impacting lives, and yes, we are saving lives through the connections that we are making. This did not happen overnight, and we know that grant funding will someday fail to exist. That is why we are here today, to share our stories of success, of redemption, and to ask for permanent funding that is so critical for our teams and our communities.

Thank you for your time today and your work in Ohio. We ask you to support Sen. Johnson and Landis' budget amendment to provide permanent funding for our team and others across the state.