

Dr. Terry Johnson
State Senator
14th Senate District



Sponsor Testimony
Senate Bill 7
Senate Education Committee
January 29th, 2024

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 7.

The state of Ohio has spent millions upon millions of dollars attempting to tackle drug addiction, which runs rampant in our communities. While many of these efforts and programs have had some success, we have not done enough for prevention; a multitude of efforts small and large has been moving forward, seemingly with no coordination. It is difficult to quantify what exists and how much is being spent on the various programs, and there are no metrics for measuring success.

Hundreds of millions of dollars are allocated towards treatment and prevention each year in the state operating budget, but it is incredibly difficult to track down those dollars and see what effect they are having. Prevention is the key to getting ahead of this terrible problem, and we need to focus much more of our effort there immediately.

In 2011, I worked with Representative Dave Burke to pass House Bill 93, which closed down pill mills across Ohio. This was a huge and positive step in addressing the opioid epidemic. However, as we predicted, people remained addicted to drugs and continued to die of accidental poisonings, despite the closure of these pill mills. They simply had to turn elsewhere for their supply.

The data reflects this bleak reality. According to the most complete data available from the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, between the years 2012 and 2023 **45,859** Ohioans died from an accidental drug overdose. The vast majority of these deaths were opioid- (primarily fentanyl)-related.¹ Even worse, the highest death rate is linked to younger generations, especially those aged 25-34. That age group would have been about 12-21 when House Bill 93 closed down the pill mills. According to the CDC, roughly **300 Americans (14 Ohioans) die per day** from accidental poisonings – and those numbers are increasing every year; nearly three-quarters of those deaths involve an opioid. ²

Statistics on youth/teen drug use are stunning and discouraging. National overdose deaths due to opioids have increased 500% among 15-24-year-olds since 1999. Between the years 2016 and 2020, drug use among eighth graders went up 61%. In Ohio specifically, nearly 8% of 12-17 year olds reported using drugs in the last month, and nearly 12% reported using marijuana in the last year. 3.48% of all Ohioans aged 12-17 in the prior year met the criteria for illicit drug use disorder (IDUD).³

In order to effectively fight the war on drugs with gloves off, we need to go after the demand for drugs, not just the supply. We need an approach that acknowledges that children are the most impressionable people in our society, and we are failing them if we are not adequately educating them on the evils of drugs.

Senate Bill 7 is a reintroduction and reworking of Senate Bill 205 from the previous General Assembly. My office has worked with the Department of Education and Workforce (DEW) in developing a strategy which will best educate and fortify our K-12 students, emphasizing the importance of evidence-based instruction, conforming to a prevention best-practices framework, and addressing the changes in knowledge, attitude, and skills as a child develops.

¹ <https://odh.ohio.gov/know-our-programs/violence-injury-prevention-program/injury-data>

² <https://blogs.cdc.gov/nchs/2023/05/18/7365/>

³ <https://drugabusestatistics.org/teen-drug-use/#ohio>

As a first step in curbing the upward path of death and destruction, this bill will require annual, developmentally appropriate instruction in the harms of and restrictions against drugs of abuse (including, but not limited to, marijuana, alcohol, tobacco, and e-cigarettes in addition to more deadly drugs) to be provided to students attending both public and private schools in Ohio. To assist schools in accomplishing this effectively, DEW in collaboration with the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OMHAS) will be required to develop a list of evidence-based curricula, materials, programs, and instructional strategies related to this topic, which school districts may utilize.

While simple, I believe this policy change begins a much-needed process of targeting drug prevention in a meaningful way: one that can save lives and prevent Ohio's children from a lifetime of drug abuse and suffering.

Thank you again for your time and attention. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Changes from SB 205:

- Added emphasis to evidence-based instruction.
- Added further clarification towards annual K-12 developmentally appropriate instruction in a manner determined by each school/district.
- Removed all instances of “illicit exogenous substances” and replaced with “substance use” in order to harmonize with pre-existing guidelines.
- Incorporated “prevention best-practice” language as it pertains to Ohio Administrative Code [Rule 5122-29-20](#), particularly Division (B).
 - That education should acknowledge the increasing skills, attitudes, and behaviors of a child as they develop.
- Includes Section 3313.6024 for reporting purposes, removing all previous survey language.
 - Each public school district shall report on their curriculum, with chartered nonpublic schools being notified and given the option to report.