HB 57 Proponent Testimony – Beth Weinstock

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Ingram, and Members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 57.

House Bill 57 is a vital life-saving measure to ensure that Ohio schools are able to save young lives in the face of an opioid crisis that has found its way onto school grounds. This bill mandates that school districts choosing to supply overdose-reversal drugs, like naloxone, establish policies for their proper storage, training, and rapid administration in the event of a student overdose. With these policies in place, we can create safer school environments and a community that is equipped to respond immediately when every second counts.

In my work as the Executive Director of BirdieLight, educating middle & high school students across the state about fentanyl safety, I have found many schools maintain a narcan supply on campus, while others don't. In this case, many administrators have requested more training and guidance on how to store, train staff, and ensure rapid administration in the face of an overdose.

Over the past years, we've seen cases across Ohio where this immediate response made the difference between life and death. In 2023, a high school student in Toledo was revived by two doses of naloxone after overdosing in a classroom. For that student's family, teachers, and friends, naloxone was the lifeline that saved them from an unspeakable tragedy. But these incidents are not isolated. Overdose deaths among young Ohioans, especially those aged 10-19, have surged, driven by fentanyl—a drug so potent that even a few grains can be deadly. And fentanyl is no longer confined to opioids; it's being found in other substances teens may experiment with, such as marijuana and vape products. This crisis demands that we equip our schools to respond.

School districts in Akron, Columbus, and Cleveland have already taken proactive steps by making naloxone available on their campuses. Naloxone is a drug with no abuse potential, intended for one purpose: to save lives by reversing the effects of an opioid overdose. When it is accessible, naloxone can be administered quickly, especially if available in multiple places throughout the school, similar to AEDs. Research shows that naloxone can drastically improve survival rates if given promptly.

With House Bill 57, we have the opportunity to empower every Ohio school to respond to this crisis. The bill also allows schools to accept monetary donations for naloxone, opening the door for communities to invest in their own safety. It's a simple but profound way to keep our children safe and to ensure that every teacher, staff member, and student is equipped with a layer of protection against an invisible threat that is costing young lives across our state.

Our children are growing up in a world none of us imagined—a world where a single, unintended exposure can have deadly consequences. I know this personally; my son Eli took a single pill in 2021, while a sophomore at American University. If someone near him had been equipped with naloxone, he would be with us today. This bill is more than just a set of policies; it's about protecting our sons and daughters, classmates and friends, young people with entire futures ahead of them. Behind every overdose prevented is a family kept whole, a community spared from mourning, and a life saved.

House Bill 57 will ensure that Ohio's schools are not only prepared but empowered to save lives when the unthinkable happens.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

Beth Weinstock

Executive Director, BirdieLight