

Testimony for the Senate Finance Committee Hearings

Hart Pharmacy

Cincinnati, OH

Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

We are writing in support of pharmacy regulation and reform language in the State Budget.

Pharmacy across the country is under threat. We have watched as PBMs (pharmacy benefit managers) have placed monopolization and profiteering over patient care and accessibility. Ohio is not immune to the abuse from PBMs. The Ohio Board of Pharmacy "Pharmacy Access" dashboard just released data for Q1 2025. So far this year 45 pharmacies have closed, including 17 independent pharmacies. For perspective, 19 independent pharmacies closed in Ohio for ALL OF 2024.

This is a crisis for patient care. Ohio is less healthy when their access to care is limited or denied. Our community of Price Hill in Cincinnati still has 2 independent pharmacies. My patients are lucky to have access to delivery, walk-in access to a pharmacist, drug counselling and over-the-counter recommendations. Most neighborhoods in Cincinnati do not. The State Board of Pharmacy's dashboard also includes "pharmacy deserts." That means that there are no pharmacies available within a 1-mile radius in urban areas and 10 miles in rural areas. Patients who are disabled, have limited mobility or no access to transportation can't travel these distances for care. The care needs to be brought to them and that is what a community pharmacy like mine provides.

"A Day in the Life" of Hart Pharmacy usually includes all of the following:

- ✓ Delivering to a homebound patient and also taking out her trash when we leave so she doesn't have to ask someone else to do it.
- ✓ A patient coming in with allergy symptoms, who doesn't know what OTC medications to try or if they should see their doctor. We take the time to talk to them.
- ✓ Sitting down with a patient and their family to put together medication packaging because the patient is having memory problems, has a complex medication regimen, or in general no longer feels confident in correctly taking their own medication
- ✓ Speaking to a physician office about a patient who was recently released from the hospital and which medications are being changed.

These vital services are lost with every pharmacy that closes. Ohioans will be sicker.

We are asking the State Legislature to pass the budget with the following measures taken into consideration:

- The Barhorst payment transparency provision requires pharmacies to be paid at cost. This is a key provision to reverse the growing trend of Ohio patients losing pharmacy access and keeping Ohio's pharmacies in business. Ohio Medicaid uses this same payment method for Medicaid, and it has saved the state upwards of \$140 million. It's time to stabilize patient access to Ohio pharmacies.
- House Bill 229 on PBM reform is vital to stop the monopolistic behavior of PBMs. Just three PBMs control 80% of the market through high prices and lack of payment transparency. Ohio businesses and patients deserve transparency in their pricing, and that starts with House Bill 229. It must be added to the budget.
- The 340B program is vital to medication access for Ohioans. An earlier version of the budget disallowed Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) from contracting with community pharmacies. FQHCs cannot meet the pharmacy demand alone. We support bringing this specific provision back within the budget to maintain medication access and avoid higher costs that may come, especially in the rural areas of the state, if FQHC contracting with community pharmacies is not allowed.
- The single PBM model for Ohio Medicaid must remain unchanged. Utilizing a single PBM has saved Ohio taxpayers \$140 million just in two years. Removing this would throw Ohio's pharmacies back to the jungle of PBM price gouging and overcharges. Maintain these savings, keep prices down for taxpayers, and make no changes to the single PBM model.

Thank you for your time and consideration. As a third-generation pharmacy, we are continuing a proud tradition of caring for 4 generations of patients in Price Hill in Cincinnati. The proposed measures will help to stabilize and support pharmacies in caring for the patients most at risk for being forgotten or lost. Across the medical spectrum, the presence of pharmacists improves outcomes for patients. Help us to maintain the highest levels of care for the patients of Ohio.

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