Dear esteemed members and thank you for your service,

My name is Dru Ely, and I'm 32, and I believe kratom leaf has saved my life. I used to struggle heavily with addiction to heroin and liquor, and upon getting off those things was given a slew of pharmaceuticals from benzodiazepines to trazadone to gabapentin to prozac to suboxone, all of which had horrible side effects, and I would continue relapsing while on them. Nothing has helped me more than plain kratom leaf, it has allowed me to find stability in my life and become a functioning member of society, holding a job and paying my bills, buying my first car, and fixing relationships, getting off all other substances even cannabis, never relapsing for a decade now and so on.

Kratom leaf is extremely safe, and I believe it is much safer than alcohol, alcohol also hits opiate receptors and is legal, which is why I think it's crucial to bring alcohol up. No one bats an eyelash at how alcohol is in gas stations, a far more deadly and dangerous drug than kratom, alcohol is killing 1000s in America. I also want to make a distinction between kratom leaf and synthetic kratom (7oh) to be clear- I am only talking about natural kratom leaf. I have gone around and around with so many substances, and can say without a doubt kratom is by far the safest and weakest one. I believe this push by the BOP to schedule it is heavily influenced by pharmaceutical interests, like getting people like me on suboxone or methadone, which are much much stronger than kratom, and I never want to go back on suboxone again. It is extremely hard to taper and quit suboxone- it's very easy to taper kratom as it is dosed in grams and someone can painlessly go from 8 grams to 7.9 to 7.8 and so on, the same can't be said about alcohol and suboxone. I have quit kratom leaf before, and went back to it after two years for quality of life and depression. Quitting kratom gave me a few days of bad sleep and restlessness- quitting suboxone gave me months of extreme depression and weeks of flu like symptoms. Quitting alcohol required medical care due to fear of seizures. My point in all of these comparisons is to show how safe kratom is.

I also want to point out how this 200 deaths thing about kratom is incorrect- the vast, vast majority had other substances in their system like fentanyl. If someone dies with kratom and fentanyl in their system, it's clearly the fentanyl and not the kratom leaf. Kratom has been tolerated with no deaths for so long now, only now with this synthetic kratom boom have any popped up, and the number is still far lower than alcohol, which again is legal. While there may be some cases, I think it's definitely kills FAR less than alcohol, and I think most cases involve underlying conditions or mixing with pharmaceuticals or illicit drugs, not leaf kratom alone. The same cannot be said for alcohol, it can kill you without mixing it with other things or underlying conditions. Kratom truly is an extremely safe plant. The deaths that could happen from kratom users going back to hard drugs also would be a higher number, fentanyl overdoses are down for the first time in a while and I guarantee kratom has to do with that.

Ohioans just legalized cannabis, this isn't the will of the people to ban another plant. I don't understand why the BOP wants to do this when Ohio is in the grips of an opiate epidemic killing so many people, it is obvious to see that someone switching from fentanyl, which could kill them at any moment, to kratom is a huge step in the right direction. Taking away kratom removes a legal way out of addiction for so many people, especially lower income people who cannot afford to quit work for 6 months and pay for a rehab. Or people with no health insurance, kratom is extremely affordable.

I also struggle with diagnosed depression and anxiety, kratom has also helped me with that, far more than antidepressants, just like with addiction. There are also many people using kratom for pain management, many elderly and military veterans. Taking kratom away would impact lower income people the most, and people without healthcare and access to other treatment. And to make it schedule 1 like street drugs is just unbelievable- not only are they trying to take away a solution that is working for so many people, they want to make people like me into criminals. I have worked so hard to get out of heroin addiction and get my life on track and it is scary that the main tool I used to accomplish that is being demonized.

Kratom is not a traditional opiate in any way, it has a ceiling effect so you can't just keep taking more to get high, it self regulates. It has been very easy to keep my kratom dose the same without upping it, I take the same amount I took starting 10 years ago. It is also a partial opiate meaning it doesn't produce respiratory depression like say Percocet or OxyContin, let alone heroin and fentanyl, making it miles safer. Many people also use kratom to quit these pain pills giving by doctors as kratom is much safer, has much less side effects, and doesn't produce a strong grip over their lives like the pills do.

I do believe kratom should be regulated to keep it away from children, just like alcohol. It is the common sense move, and to get rid of these ultra potent synthetic kratom extracts that are nothing like kratom leaf itself. The harm taking kratom away from Ohioans would be immediately seen- an influx of people trying to get Medicaid and suboxone, a new black market formed that wouldn't be as safe as going to a store to buy kratom, people going back to their drug of choice like heroin or liquor, elderly people unable to deal with their pain, people trying to deal with their mental illnesses that they otherwise had under control, loss of jobs from the legitimate kratom stores and so on.

Please pass this bill to keep kratom safe and accessible to adults who truly benefit from it, keep it from children.

Thank you for your time.