

Thank you to Chairwoman Manchester and the Government Oversight and Reform Committee for allowing me to present testimony in support of reforms within the Ohio Budget Bill HB96 that will allow pharmacies in Ohio to be reimbursed fairly.

I am asking you to keep in place the “fair reimbursement” language that is in HB96 that the House already passed. **The provisions for pharmacy in HB96 MUST be kept.** This language supports small, independent pharmacies and, by keeping them in business, slows the spread of pharmacy deserts which are emerging across Ohio. These pharmacy deserts prevent adequate access to healthcare depending on a patient’s zip code.

Why is the pharmacy portion of the bill so important to keep within the budget?

Let me tell you my story.

My name is Ernie Sparks. I own Ernie’s pharmacy in London, Ohio.

London, Ohio is my home town and I graduated from London High School.

I’ve been a pharmacist for 42 years and a drug store owner for 37 years.

I’ve had some really tough times in my 37 years as a drug store owner, but I cannot remember any tougher times than the past couple years.

It seems like each year the PBMs pay us less and continue to try to steer my customers to their pharmacies.

They CLAWBACK money from us after the sale through complex contract terms and fancy acronyms like BER and GER, just to name a few.

It costs a pharmacy in Ohio about \$12 above the cost of the drug to fill a prescription.

Most times, I’m paid at or below my cost. I’m in a buying group with 2,000 other pharmacies so I’m sure I couldn’t buy the drugs any cheaper. Obviously, the math doesn’t work on this for a business.

Recently, we had a patient come in who needed a medication for *c diff*, a very serious infection. If we filled it for the patient, her copay was \$1200 and we would lose \$400. I had to send her to a chain pharmacy where her copay was then \$1600.

How can one copay be different from one pharmacy to another? The chain pharmacy ended up sending her to a specialty pharmacy, because they were losing money on the prescription, as well.

This past year I've decided that if the PBM insurance company doesn't cover the cost of the drug--- We don't have it. Every day, I'm sending people in need of medicine away----this is a heck of a way to do business. They need medicine for conditions like diabetes and medicine to prevent blood clots and I have to turn them away.

The citizens are suffering.

Do a little homework and if the independent pharmacies are still open in your districts, please call them and check with the pharmacist to see how things are going. Please reach out to some citizens also about their pharmacy experiences. I think they will give you an earful.

Please protect Ohio's remaining independent drugstores and slow the damage the PBMs continue to carry out on owners like me who are barely hanging on. Please keep the "fair pharmacy reimbursement" language in the budget and protect Ohio patients who will lose essential healthcare if their local pharmacies close.

Finally, as the pharmacy business is doing so poorly, I just want you to know that I have garage sales on the weekend, because making 50 cents on something excites me.

Respectfully,

Ernest Sparks

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