

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 and to stay in business for Ohio patients.

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 Robin Craft. My husband and I were pharmacy owners for twenty-five years. We owned four independent drugstores in rural communities, Mechanicsburg, Plain City, West Jefferson, and one in an urban, underserved area in Columbus. Areas that now no longer have a pharmacy close by. Areas that have become pharmacy deserts.

Owning an independent pharmacy was not initially my dream. It was my husband’s. From the moment Joe interned with his mentor and friend, Ernie Sparks, at Ernie’s independent drugstore, The Medicine Shoppe, in London, Ohio, Joe was enthralled and wanted to own a store.

It took Joe four years after graduating from The Ohio State University’s College of Pharmacy in 1995 to open Plain City Druggist in our home town of Plain City, Ohio in 1999. I had just finished pharmacy school that year and supported us with a “real job” until I could begin working in the store, as well.

It's funny, but sometimes when you love someone, their dreams encompass so much of your life that their dreams become yours. That is what happened to me with Joe's dream of pharmacy ownership. It became my life and future, as well.

On February 5, 2024, almost twenty-five years from the time we opened our doors in 1999, that dream, that had become both of ours, died. After having our busiest year on record in 2023 with \$12 million in sales and serving over 10,000 patients, we closed.

We did not close because we wanted to close. We did not close to retire and spend the rest of our days on a remote sun-soaked beach. We did not close because we had become disenchanted with pharmacy and our patients.

We closed because we had NO choice. We were run out of business by the greed of Pharmacy Benefits Managers, PBMs.

We spent the last few weeks that we were open sending patients to other pharmacies, because we could not fill their prescriptions without losing money on nearly every medication. What kind of business model is that? Busier than we have ever been, but losing so much money, we are sending patients away?

Every day, I go online and find news reports of independent pharmacies that have closed nationwide. Every statement these owners post online begins, "With heavy hearts, we are **unexpectedly** closing our pharmacy..."

Unexpectedly. That is the word of note. This was not where Joe and I expected to be at this point in our lives. Our unfinished dream was to retire and sell our stores, many years in the future, to one of our students who was also our pharmacist manager and someone who had become like a son to us. His dream, he had told us when he was still in high school, was to own

his own pharmacy in his hometown and take care of his friends and neighbors. Joe quipped at the time, “Hey, that’s my job!”

That job, that dream, our way of life, is now lost for all of us.

In 2024, 191 pharmacies closed in Ohio. Dreams lost just like ours.

Everywhere we go, we run into former patients who tell us sad stories about how their lives have changed without our pharmacies. They can’t get delivery. They can’t find anyone to fill a prescription after hours. Their medicines didn’t get filled when they should have. They don’t know who to ask when they have questions. They are lost, confused. On and on. They cry. We cry.

And what makes me angriest is that this whole thing is a total waste.

A waste of time. A waste of money. A waste of talent.

My husband, Joe Craft, is one of the most talented, hard-working, compassionate pharmacists and entrepreneurs you will ever meet. He knew how to run a business. He knew how to treat people, including our staff, colleagues, and patients.

Together we invested half our lives, untold amounts of money, and so much passion to take care of our pharmacy communities.

Our pharmacy buildings now stand empty. Our 50 employees have moved on to other jobs, some no longer in healthcare. The fixtures, equipment and merchandise that we had purchased to make our stores shine have been sold, donated, or thrown away.

And Joe’s talent is no longer being used to help so many, many patients who need him.

PBMs save no one money. They only take and take and take.

A total waste to healthcare.

I hope that you will protect Ohio's remaining independent drugstores and slow the damage the PBMs continue to carry out on the owners we know 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.

Otherwise, not only will the pharmacy owners we know have to close their stores, but patients will suffer from a lack of local healthcare.

Thank you.

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