

Protecting Lives and Progress: A Bipartisan Effort Urging Full Restoration of Naloxone Funding in Ohio's State Budget

Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Liston, and Esteemed Members of Senate Health Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Hamilton County Addiction Response Coalition. My name is Commissioner Denise Driehaus. Prior to my service as a Hamilton County Commissioner, I served four terms in the Ohio House of Representatives representing the 31st Ohio House District. In 2017, upon joining the Commission, I was provided the opportunity to Chair the Addiction Response Coalition and it has been my honor to lead the group for the past 8 years.

As a coalition of subject matter experts and stakeholders, the Hamilton County Addiction Response Coalition is dedicated to addressing addiction through comprehensive, evidence-based solutions. Guided by four foundational pillars - prevention, treatment, interdiction, and harm reduction - our action-oriented approach fosters collaboration across the business industry, faith leaders, and recovery communities to develop long-term solutions to the addiction crisis.

The Hamilton County Addiction Response Coalition strongly supports the Governor's version of the budget related to funding for strategies to reduce overdose deaths, including funding for Naloxone, and in turn are deeply concerned about the Ohio House of Representative's decision to reduce this critical funding in their version of the state budget (HB 96). This decision undermines a vital tool in the fight against the opioid epidemic and jeopardizes the lives of countless Ohioans.

The funding in question, from the Department of Health's Chronic Disease, Injury Prevention, and Drug Overdose Line Item 440482, supports the distribution of Naloxone to first responders, community organizations, and individuals on the frontlines of the opioid epidemic. The proposed cuts from \$8,134,715 in FY24 and \$8,000,000 in FY25 (Governor DeWine's Proposal) to \$5,000,000 in FY26 and \$5,240,000 in FY27 (the Ohio House's Proposal) a cut of nearly \$6M would have devastating consequences, stripping away access to a life-saving resource and undermining our community's ability to prevent overdose fatalities.

Since 2014, Talbert House has distributed over 21,000 Narcan kits and secured \$1.6 million in funding to support our community. Since the launch of widespread Naloxone distribution in 2017, Hamilton County Public Health has provided over 97,000 doses to first responders, court systems, schools, deflection teams, behavioral health organizations, and community members. Additionally, since 2019, the Cincinnati Fire Department has responded to 8,275 unique incidents involving Naloxone administration. Since 2022, Hamilton County EMS has reported administering 7,684 doses of Naloxone, as tracked by the Ohio Emergency Medical Services' Naloxone Watch Dashboard. Collectively, these efforts have contributed to a 51% decrease in overdose fatalities since 2017, offering hope and second chances to families and individuals battling addiction.

Naloxone is not just a medication; it is the first step in the continuum of care. It is the intervention point that allows individuals to access the treatment and support they need to recover. It is fundamental to our overall strategic approach to address addiction in our community. The administration of Naloxone is often the point in time when an individual becomes known to our care providers and allows for conversation about treatment and recovery. It allows us to enter a person's life with a message of hope and support. It can lead to a person's first step on the road to a fruitful and prosperous life for themselves and their families.

Recovery has a transformative impact not only on individuals and their families, but also on our communities and economy. When people recover, they reduce the strain on Medicaid by avoiding costly hospital encounters and ease the burden on the criminal justice system by reducing rates of incarceration. Recovery reintegrates individuals into the workforce, turning lives around and contributing positively to Ohio's economy. Supporting access to Naloxone isn't just compassionate - it's a fiscally responsible and effective strategy to build stronger, safer, and more prosperous communities. The proposed budget cuts threaten to undo years of progress, jeopardize public safety, and abandon individuals in their most vulnerable moments, placing undue burden on communities already working tirelessly to save lives.

Our advocacy today is a bipartisan effort. I am joined by Clermont County Commissioner David Painter, President of the County Commissioners Association of Ohio. Commissioner Painter has been a leading voice advocating for strategies to fight addiction in our communities and will share information from the Clermont County Addiction and Recovery Partnership (CARP).

CARP was started in 2011 to bring the community together to address the devastating impact of the heroin epidemic in Clermont County. CARP worked together on a four-pronged approach to focus on increasing access to treatment, preventing overdoses, increasing access to harm reduction products such as Naloxone, and reducing the supply of drugs in Clermont County. We were one of the earliest and hardest hit counties in Ohio and began seeing the impact of unintentional overdose deaths as early as 2007. Clermont ranked fourth in the nation, per 100,000, for heroin overdose deaths between 2009 to 2013. Clermont County continued to be in the top five counties in the state for unintentional overdose deaths through 2013, and in the top 10 until the past several years. Through the work of CARP, Clermont County has now significantly lowered our unintentional overdose death rate. The widespread distribution of Naloxone throughout our country was a "game changer" that saved many lives.

Because they are often the first to respond to a scene, our Sheriff's Office was one of the first law enforcement agencies in the state to carry Naloxone. Because of this, we immediately began to see a decrease in the number of unintentional overdose deaths. At first, Law Enforcement was hesitant to administer Naloxone, but after the first life was saved, other law enforcement and FIRE/EMS jurisdictions quickly recognized the importance and began carrying Naloxone. Our Quick Response Team (QRT) provides Naloxone to overdose survivors, and their families and neighbors, saving even more lives! CARP has also worked to start three Project Dawn sites that provide access to free Naloxone with no judgement and no questions asked. CARP also supported the

installation of two Naloxone Vending Machines in the county which provide 24-hour access to free Naloxone and other harm reduction materials.

Naloxone is a critical tool to fight the substance abuse epidemic. Widespread access to free Naloxone is absolutely a necessity to continue to fight the opioid epidemic. While overdoses still continue in our county, the death rate from unintentional overdoses has decreased from a high of 105 down to 21 in 2024!

Without the availability of Naloxone, Clermont County would soon see an increase in deaths. Of the EMS Departments reporting, there were 204 individual dosages administered by EMS in 2024. Clermont was 15th in the state for administration of Naloxone in 2024. Close to 2,200 dosages of Naloxone were also provided to the community, through law enforcement administration, QRT outreach, community events, and Project Dawn. These dosages represent the lives of Clermont County residents that were saved as the result of the availability of Naloxone!

We urge the Ohio Senate to amend the state budget and align with Governor DeWine's proposal to maintain \$8,000,000 per year in FY26 and FY27. This funding is essential to sustain initiatives like Naloxone distribution, which has proven to save lives and reduce overdose deaths.

In closing, Hamilton and Clermont Counties jointly call on state leaders to protect Ohio's communities by fully restoring the Department of Health's Chronic Disease, Injury Prevention, and Drug Overdose Line Item 440482, funding to its original levels. The stakes are far too high to ignore!

The voices of our community echo the importance of Naloxone and saving lives!

“Naloxone is one of the most vital tools our firefighters and paramedics carry-it saves lives in seconds and gives people a second chance. In a city hit hard by the opioid crisis, having naloxone on every fire truck and medic unit isn’t just essential, it’s non-negotiable” - District Chief Carstell Winston, EMS Operations for Cincinnati Fire Department



“My name is Kate Dawes, and I’m the Community Outreach Manager for a treatment center in Southwest Ohio. I’m also a respected advocate, a wife, a mother of three, and someone deeply committed to serving our region through nonprofits and board leadership. I grew up in a middle-class American family. My mother was an Account Executive for a large commercial insurance company, and my father worked as a Commercial HVAC Foreman. My parents remained married until my mother’s passing. As the eldest of two children, I was a straight-A student who was active in sports and extracurricular activities, even earning a full scholarship to nursing school. Despite this promising start, a legally prescribed pain medication eventually led to an addiction that tragically spiraled into heroin use. But my passion for this work comes from lived experience. I am alive today because Narcan saved me, **36 times**. I was revived in my home, in my car, dumped at hospitals, behind the wheel, and even twice in the same day. I was the person many believed would never recover. But thanks to first responders who had access to Narcan, I was given the chance not just to survive, but to change. Today, I help thousands of others pursue treatment and rebuild their lives, something that would never have happened without that medication.

“As someone who has administered Naloxone on sidewalks, in cars, and in gas station bathrooms, each dose was an attempt to save a life, and many times, it did. I’ll never forget one man, sprawled on the floor of a public bathroom. He was cold, gray, and letting out the death rattle, a haunting sound you never forget once you’ve heard it. I gave him Naloxone and stayed with him as he came back to life. A few days later, while in the community, he walked up to me and said, “I’m still here because of you.” That moment reminded me why this work matters so much. These are not just numbers; they are people. Human beings. Someone’s child, regardless of their age. Cutting Naloxone from the state budget is not a fiscal decision, it’s a moral one. It sends a devastating message: that some lives are not worth saving. Narcan provides a second chance, a chance for recovery, for healing, for hope. Please don’t take that chance away.” - Sarah Coyne, Hamilton County Resident