



**House Bill 248, Proponent Testimony
House Health and Aging Committee
April 27th, 2016**

Chairwoman Gonzales, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the House Health and Aging Committee; thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of House Bill 248. My name is Jeff Fix, I am the President of the Pickerington City Council where I have served for more than 10 years. I am also on the Board of Directors for a group called Tyler's Light. I'm writing this testimony today because I believe that opiate abuse in all its forms is snatching a generation from us and I will do anything I can to fight it.

The opiate epidemic is creating significant negative social and financial impacts in my community, throughout our State, and across the country.

I became aware of a heroin issue in our community six years ago when friends who are parents called me to ask what Pickerington was doing to deal with the heroin issue in our high schools. At first, like many, I was in denial. Heroin was for junkies, not suburban high school kids. But I asked our Police Chief and he confirmed in no uncertain terms that heroin was a significant and rapidly growing issue in our community and others. I met with former Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services Director Orman Hall, and he opened my eyes to the depth and severity of what he called the "opiate epidemic." I learned that most drug abusers don't start at heroin. Rather, they find easy access to prescription opiates like Vicodin which quickly hooks them, makes them an addict, turns them into a criminal.

My fight against opiate abuse began.

In Pickerington we've lost dozens of teens and young adults over the past several years. Dozens of families torn apart, dozens of youngsters who had everything going for them, a bright future, perhaps a family of their own. All wiped out because they tried that first pill.

In 2011 my friend Wayne Campbell lost his son Tyler to a heroin overdose. Tyler was 21. He was a star football player, excellent student, a leader at Pickerington North High School. He went on to play football at the University of Akron and led the team in tackles when they played Ohio State at the Horseshoe in 2009; a great day for the Campbell family.

Later Tyler sustained a shoulder injury playing football, had surgery, and was prescribed Vicodin to address his pain. He became addicted to Vicodin and when his prescriptions ran out he needed to get more. He would do anything to get his hands on it. It literally and figuratively turned him into a different person. He was introduced to Oxy Cotton, and eventually to heroin. His parents did everything they could to save him. Two days after leaving a rehab program for the last time; and only two short years from that great day at Ohio Stadium, Tyler Campbell died of a heroin overdose.

In heroic fashion, the Campbell family chose not to bury their grief and anger. Rather, they founded Tyler's Light and have dedicated their lives to try to spare other families the pain they suffer with every day. Mr. Campbell has now spoken to over 60,000 students in Ohio and six other states and has been featured on shows like HBO's Real Sports and soon on 60 Minutes; and in the USA Today newspaper. His message is getting through; but in our Board Meetings we refer to this as "spitting in the ocean." You see the epidemic is so vast, moves so quickly, and is so hard to shake, that there is truly no way we can reach enough kids with a message of prevention to stop this scourge.

WE HAVE TO DO MORE.

In January of 2012 we heard the tragic news that my good friend and fellow Council Member Heidi Riggs had lost her beautiful 20 year old daughter Marin to a heroin overdose. I had watched this girl grow up, seen her on the Pickerington Central Golf Team, and on the parade float as "Miss Teen Pickerington." She was a wonderful kid and now she's gone and her parents will never recover.

You see that is a part of the social cost of this epidemic. It's the families, the school communities, the neighborhoods that are all suffering with the losses. Go to Bishop Watterson High School today and you will witness a school community in strife over the recent loss of a three-star athlete – a great kid who died of a heroin overdose this summer. That entire school community is reeling today, searching for answers. An entire school full of kids is asking themselves what they should have done differently to try to save their friend and classmate. They will carry the guilt of not having done enough for the rest of their lives.

My generation of parents is scared to death that their son or daughter will be snatched into a life of addiction, crime, and a horrible, preventable death. I have a 20-year old daughter and a 17-year old son. I live every day with the fear that they may be next. They are good kids, we've raised them well. They are good students, leaders in their classes, hardworking, courteous. I'm proud of them. And I'm scared to death. Their generation is being decimated by this epidemic.

So the social impact is real, it's significant, it's long lasting, and it's immeasurable.

WE HAVE TO DO MORE.

From a business perspective this epidemic has significant costs as well. I work for a distribution company who has a fleet of 25 trucks that cross the state every day. I can tell you that five years ago finding warehouse help and truck drivers was not an issue. We had plenty of

qualified applicants and a strong, steady staff. Today we struggle to find good help. You see we have a drug testing policy at my company and if you can't pass a drug test, you can't come to work for us. Today three of every five applicants we see can't pass a drug test, and these are just the applicants we see. Our number of applications is down significantly we feel – in large part – because it is known that we do test for drugs. We struggle to keep help as we apply random drug tests throughout our organization. The true cost of the opiate epidemic on just MY business is in the tens of thousands of dollars every year. Multiply that by the hundreds of businesses like mine who rely on hourly skilled and unskilled labor and you can see how significant the financial impact of this issue is. In Fairfield County we have companies that are begging our local governments to help them find skilled labor. They have dozens of jobs left unfilled because they can't find a labor pool that can pass a drug test.

So this issue not only carries a real cost in how it impacts companies like mine, it has the opportunity cost of the well-paying jobs left unfilled.

WE HAVE TO DO MORE

Finally there is the cost to my government and hundreds of other local governments just like it across the State of Ohio.

Crime is up 23% in Pickerington over last year. 23%!! This includes a rise not only in actual heroin and opiate prescription arrests, but also an increase in arrests directly related to opiate use such as petty thefts, shoplifting and motor vehicle break ins.

Our Police Commanders tell me that an addict can easily have a \$150-\$200/day habit. Since most addicts are not employed, they resort to theft, and pawning of the stolen items to sustain their addiction.

In Pickerington we have 20,000 residents. We have a \$7 million budget. Two years ago, in addition to the deployment of our K-9 unit, we added one full time officer and last year one part time officer to the force **JUST TO FIGHT OPIATE RELATED CRIME**. In this year's budget process our Police Chief is asking for six more police officers at an estimated cost of \$700,000 to turn the tide on this increase.

Overall this will cost our taxpayers nearly 1 million dollars (14% of the current budget – 14%!!) and those are just ADDITIONAL police forces needed.

To pay for this we've foregone the paving roads that need it badly, will not add on to infrastructure that is straining with age – our Council is being forced to make cuts in other areas of our budget to pay for the opiate epidemic and ours is just one example of hundreds of local governments across the state - struggling financially with this issue.

Pickerington participates in the Fairfield/Hocking County Major Crime Unit. From them we know that roughly 70% of all the crimes that they have worked on over the past four years have been opiate related. 70%!!

WE HAVE TO DO MORE

House Bill 248 is not a magic bullet that will make the opiate issue go away. There is no magic bullet. Rather, it is one step of a thousand that we must collectively take to find an overall solution. The social and financial impacts of the opiate epidemic on our communities across the state are staggering. I fully support Representatives Sprague and Antonio and all the experts who are working to move our legislature in a positive direction on this issue. Any step we can take to curb addiction, to prevent that next kid from getting hooked – is absolutely necessary – and it's the right thing to do.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my testimony. I am hopeful that this committee and our state legislature as a whole will quickly and clearly see the merits of this bill and pass it unanimously.