



Senator Theresa Gavarone

2nd Ohio Senate District

Sponsor Testimony for Substitute Senate Bill 25

House Criminal Justice Committee

October 12, 2021

Chairman LaRe, Vice-Chairman Swearingen and Ranking Member Leland, I appreciate the chance to address you and the other members of the Criminal Justice Committee about my legislation, Senate Bill 25, also known as the 'Relapse Reduction Act'. This legislation would elevate the level of offense for certain drug crimes that occur near substance addiction services providers and prohibit the defrauding of a drug or urine screening test.

Similar to what I did with Senate Bill 2 earlier this year, Senate Bill 25 is a re-introduction of two pieces of legislation that ended up running out of time last General Assembly. This bill mixes Senate Bill 55 and Senate Bill 156 from the 133rd General Assembly.

This bill would enhance penalties for certain drug offenses that occur within 500 feet of a 'substance addiction services provider' AND when a drug dealer knowingly targets someone who is either in substance abuse treatment or recently completed substance abuse treatment. The idea is that a person coming out of a facility should be able to get to their car, the bus stop or possibly even walk to their home without being accosted by a drug dealer. That same person should also not be relentlessly hounded or hunted by drug dealers.

This issue was brought to me by my good friend and Wood County Prosecutor Paul Dobson after I asked his opinion on ways we could curb the opioid epidemic. Paul lost a stepson to a drug overdose, so this legislation is obviously important to him and countless people across Ohio.

For those people currently addicted to a substance, the decision to seek treatment could be life-changing. However, the pull their addiction has is strong and the odds they face to complete treatment at a rehab facility, even under perfect circumstances, are not great. And once a person completes treatment, they are in an extremely vulnerable state of mind and it is probable they will relapse. They are perfect prey for dealers.

A simple Google search yields many stories from across the country of drug dealers targeting people entering, staying and leaving rehab facilities. The drug dealers have a product that this population would do just about anything to get, so why shouldn't they traffic the drugs into the facility, set up camp in the parking lot or wait at the end of the street for guaranteed customers? The logic and economics are easy to understand.

Unfortunately, I have also learned about the public safety threat we face because of people who choose to mask their addiction with something called synthetic urine. This product is designed to resemble clean human urine and is manufactured to contain an appropriate balance of water and minerals that virtually assures anyone using drugs can pass a urine or drug test.

Today, synthetic urine is easily accessible. Another online search shows the sheer amount of brands and locations where you can purchase the product. If you need to pass a drug test, there is no shortage of stores you can visit to acquire synthetic urine.

Allowing people to use synthetic urine or any other means of cheating a drug or urine screening test is simply a threat to public safety. Are we really comfortable giving someone who abuses drugs or alcohol and works in trucking, construction, manufacturing, or any other field that requires the use of heavy machinery the option to continue using and working? I'm certainly not.

Currently, the risk-reward for selling drugs around a substance abuse service provider, tracking down an addict who has undergone treatment or cheating a drug or urine test is entirely slanted towards the reward side. Senate Bill 25 will fix that by increasing the rate of success for anyone entering rehab, and helping people struggling with addiction get clean so that they can become productive members of society again.

I would like to note that this legislation passed the Senate 29-1 and had 16 co-sponsors.

Finally, I would like to thank you Mr. Chairman, as well as Vice Chair Swearingen and Representative Seitz for your efforts in crafting the version of the bill before you today. They attended meetings and were all very open to phone and in-person conversations on ways to improve this legislation and I greatly appreciate their feedback.

Chairman LaRe, thank you, not just for allowing me to speak in favor of SB 25, but for your flexibility in getting a hearing scheduled in a committee that is always very busy and full of bills. I am ready to answer any questions the members may have.