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Thank you Chair LaRe, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland and members of the Criminal Justice Committee for this opportunity to testify on behalf of HB 456, which would decriminalize fentanyl drug testing strips.

Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that was originally developed for treating severe pain, but the synthetic version that is made illegally, has quickly become the deadliest drug in the illicit drug market. This bill targets fentanyl specifically because according to the Ohio Department of Health¹, fentanyl was involved in 76% of overdose deaths in 2019.

This legislation idea was brought to my attention by my constituent, Beth Weinstock. Beth's son, Eli was in his sophomore year at American University when on March 3, 2021, he tragically died. It was later determined that Eli had taken Kratom, a legal herbal supplement, which was laced with fentanyl. There was no evidence to suggest that Eli was aware that the herbal supplement had been laced with fentanyl.

As the laws currently stand, fentanyl drug testing strips are considered drug paraphernalia and it is illegal for someone to be in possession of them. With this legislation, fentanyl drug testing strips will be exempt from the definition of "drug paraphernalia" and these lifesaving strips will become more readily available.

¹ <https://odh.ohio.gov/know-our-programs/violence-injury-prevention-program/drug-overdose/#:~:text=Fentanyl%20was%20involved%20in%2076,%2C%20and%2058%25%20in%202016.>

In a 2018 study ²conducted by Johns Hopkins, 335 people who use drugs were asked whether they would change their behavior if they were able to detect fentanyl in their drugs. 70% of respondents said they would alter their behavior. These drug testing strips are an affordable and accurate harm reduction tool that when used correctly, take less than 5 minutes to detect the presence of fentanyl. Within 5 minutes, a potential overdose death can be prevented and an opportunity for an addict's recovery can begin.

The best way to address the ongoing opioid crisis that Ohio faces is through comprehensive drug treatment. However, creating widespread access to fentanyl drug testing strips is a critical step forward to prevent more Ohioans from dying from fentanyl drug overdoses.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on HB 456. I would be happy to answer any questions committee members may have at this time.

² <https://legislativeanalysis.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Fentanyl-Teststrips-FINAL-1.pdf>