

Senator Huffman

Public Testimony

110 - Health Finance Committee

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9:30 a.m.

Ohio State House

Debra Evans & Gretchen Addison, TAP United Program Coordinators

Good morning,

My name is Debi Evans. Gretchen Addison and I are TAP United Program Coordinators and she was unable to attend today due to work commitments.

Thank you for taking the time to let me speak today. Briefly I'd like to share a little about how the opioid epidemic has deeply altered the course of my life and the lives of my family. My oldest son, Michael was a Christian, handsome, intelligent and a very kind man. He was happily married with three young children. He was a soldier in the US army, was deployed to Iraq and served our country for 6 years. Michael's service was a role model to my other sons and as a result of his leadership in the Army, they too joined the army and served our country in Iraq. They still serve our country today.

During Mike's deployment in Iraq, he received a back injury while jumping out of a helicopter. After his 18 month tour, he returned home from his deployment to his wife, three young children and his family. The doctor prescribed opiates to relieve his back pain from his Army injury and this began his long, painful descent into addiction. It was a 12 year journey of Michael trying over and over again to find recovery. Because he was uninsured, he was unable to secure the help needed for his recovery to defeat the enemy of addiction. My beloved son lost his life to overdose from opiates on March 21, 2019. He was only 39 years old. His wife was widowed and his children were orphaned. I lost my beloved firstborn son, my family lost a hero, and our lives have never been the same since.

As TAP United program coordinators, we are committed to expanding our efforts not only to assisting families navigate their grief journey, but to positively impact Ohio communities in preventing overdose deaths by advocating for essential programs such as the one we are introducing to you today.

THE PROBLEM

Between June 2019 and May 2020, over 81,000 drug overdose deaths occurred in the United States, the highest number of overdose deaths ever recorded in a 12-month period (CDC). In Ohio, COVID did nothing to slow the drug trafficking and number of overdose deaths. In fact, Ohio opioid overdose deaths surged during the second quarter of 2020, making it the deadliest three-month period since the opioid epidemic began, according to a study by the Scientific Committee on Opioid Prevention and Education (SCOPE). The spike started in April 2020—right after the COVID lockdown began shortly after Gov. Mike DeWine and former Ohio

Department of Health Director Amy Acton issued a stay-at-home order in response to the coronavirus pandemic.

According to preliminary statistics released by Franklin County Coroner Dr. Ortiz, Franklin County experienced 437 drug overdose deaths during the first six months of 2020 alone. That was a 74% increase from the same period in the previous year. As parents who live with the nightmare of our child's addiction and death, we at TAP United are wanting to reduce the number of Ohioans losing their lives to overdose.

TAP United (The Addict Parents United) was created to bring information, education, advocacy opportunities, networking, and support to individuals who have a child who struggles with addiction or who have lost a loved one to an overdose. TAP United holds family support groups and provides support to those struggling with addiction throughout Ohio.

According to a 2016 research report, people with addiction and with opioid use disorder are at high risk of death in the immediate period after their release from incarceration. The study also found that in the two weeks after leaving prison those individuals were 13 times more likely to die than someone who had not been incarcerated. Drug overdose was the leading cause of death.*. Another study in North Carolina found that people who had been released were 40 times more likely to die of an opioid overdose in the two weeks after their release.

Many of the overdose deaths occur after a relapse. Relapse is part of the disease of addiction. It doesn't have to occur, but more often than not, it does. Accidental overdose is a high risk for those who relapse.

There are countless incidents of an individual overdosing during their first relapse after a period of sobriety because their bodies simply can't cope after a period of abstinence. Their tolerance levels will be extremely low and so they are at huge risk of overdosing. This is the main reason that so many die as a result of a relapse. Their bodies are no longer used to processing large quantities of alcohol and drugs, they are at huge risk of respiratory and organ failure. The COVID pandemic and subsequent quarantine has caused a huge increase of opioid overdose deaths from March 2020 to the present.

In hopes of preventing more Ohioans from dying of an overdose, we want to put together a life-saving pouch that would include Narcan, fentanyl test strips, a list of emergency crisis centers, and bus passes for those who are leaving jail, emergency rooms, rehab/detox facility. Because the chance of relapse is high, we believe these essential Lifesaver kits would actually reduce the number of accidental overdose deaths in Ohio. This epidemic has stolen so many Ohio citizens and so many family's loved ones.

We are requesting state funding earmarked for the Lifesaver Project to reduce the impact of the addiction crisis in Ohio and to save Ohio citizens from becoming a statistic in the epidemic. We would also like to give your a brochure with more information on the TAP United Organization.

I appreciate your time and attention that you've given me today. Thank you.

*(2016 -Dr. Utsha Khatri, one of the co-authors of the study is an emergency room physician and researcher at the University of Pennsylvania)