

# HARM REDUCTION OHIO

Health · Science · Compassion · Human Rights

The Honorable Stephen A. Huffman  
Senate Building  
1 Capitol Square, Ground Floor  
Columbus, OH 43215

RE: Letter of Support - Senate Bill 296

Dear Chair Huffman and Members of the Senate Health Committee,

I am writing on behalf of Harm Reduction Ohio to express our support for Senate Bill 296, which would legalize the use of narcotic testing products, including fentanyl test strips, and deregulate naloxone. If passed, this legislation would be a significant step forward for local communities and organizations working to prevent fentanyl-related overdose deaths in Ohio.

Harm Reduction Ohio is the state's largest Project DAWN program, distributing 32,500 naloxone kits in 2021 through a statewide network of 200 volunteer lay distributors and an online ordering service. We are Ohio's only non-profit dedicated full-time to reducing overdose death. We have given away more than 15,000 fentanyl test strips since 2018 and have heard directly from individuals who believe fentanyl test strips changed their behavior and may have saved their lives.

Making it possible for individuals to check their drugs for fentanyl is vital due to Ohio's increasingly lethal drug supply. Illicit fentanyl was involved in 80% of Ohio's 5,300 overdose deaths in 2021. Meth-related deaths have increased from 96 in 2014 to nearly 1,400 in 2021 – 80% of those deaths involving fentanyl. Cocaine-related deaths have increased from 685 in 2014 to about 1,500 in 2021 – 80% involving fentanyl or an analog. Essentially, all of the increase in meth and cocaine deaths are driven by fentanyl (an opioid) mixed with meth and cocaine (stimulants).<sup>i</sup> Test strips are especially valuable for the safety Ohio residents who use non-opioid drugs, often only occasionally, and have little opioid tolerance. A Harm Reduction Ohio analysis of BCI crime lab data shows about 11% of cocaine and 5% of meth had fentanyl in it last year. A little fentanyl in non-opioid drugs is killing a lot of people.

Fentanyl test strips are not a cure-all for reducing overdose death. They have been shown to facilitate behavior change to protect against overdose.<sup>ii</sup> Just as important, test strips start a conversation about drug user health. A request to stop for a moment and learn about the danger in a drug about to be consumed tells people that they have an ability take incremental changes to improved health. The harm reduction maxim of supporting "any positive change" is what evidence and experience shows works. Fentanyl test strips are a positive, incremental step toward overdose reduction.

Under current law, paraphernalia includes items used to test drugs, including fentanyl test strips. This leaves many Ohio communities and organizations fearful of potential criminal and civil penalties for distributing these life-saving tools. Senate Bill 296 would align Ohio with other states such as Arizona, which updated its state law in 2021, and open up funding for test strips to be deployed on a larger scale.

Senate Bill 296 would also remove barriers to the distribution and administration of naloxone, a life-saving drug that can reverse opioid overdose, including when fentanyl is mixed with non-opioids. This bill exempts naloxone from most Board of Pharmacy distribution laws and broadens access to naloxone to all Ohioans. Harm Reduction Ohio is the largest distributor of naloxone in Ohio partly because we have overcome the various barriers to naloxone access and now serve as an intermediary for individuals and organizations who lack the capacity to handle the regulatory paperwork. The naloxone reforms in Senate Bill 296 are an example of deregulation at its best.

On behalf of Harm Reduction Ohio, we strongly support the passage of SB 296. This legislation expands our effort to reduce fentanyl overdose deaths in Ohio. It will save lives.

Sincerely,

Dennis Cauchon  
President  
Harm Reduction Ohio  
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Granville, Ohio 43023

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<sup>i</sup> Harm Reduction Ohio analysis of Ohio Department of Health mortality data. <https://publicapps.odh.ohio.gov/EDW/DataBrowser/Browse/Mortality>

<sup>ii</sup> Fentanyl Overdose Reduction Checking Analysis Study. [https://americanhealth.jhu.edu/sites/default/files/website-media/resources/Fentanyl\\_Executive\\_Summary\\_032018.pdf](https://americanhealth.jhu.edu/sites/default/files/website-media/resources/Fentanyl_Executive_Summary_032018.pdf) and Fentanyl test strips as an opioid overdose prevention strategy: Findings from a syringe services program in the Southeastern United States. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0955395918302135>