



Dear Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Antonio, and Members of the Senate Health Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to offer proponent testimony for Senate Bill 296, which would legalize the use of narcotic testing products, including fentanyl test strips, and deregulate naloxone. My name is Minister Blyth Barnow, I serve as the Ohio Associate Director at Faith In Public Life and also sit on the leadership council for the Harm Reduction and Overdose Prevention Ministry for the United Church of Christ nationally.

Faith in Public Life has a network of over 3,000 faith leaders in Ohio. We also convene the statewide harm reduction policy table where we connect clergy, harm reduction advocates, service providers and people who use drugs. This policy table has identified the expansion of naloxone access and the legalization of fentanyl testing strips as one of our top priorities. We know that if passed, this legislation would be a significant step forward for local communities and organizations working to save lives.

Because of barriers in the Ohio Revised Code and at the Board of Pharmacy, it took over 3 years to get our naloxone distribution program up and running. Even with significant legal support, paid staff time, relationships with legislators and overwhelming support from clergy, we still struggled with roadblock after roadblock. We are grateful to have had the opportunity to work with Cameron McNamee at the Ohio Board of Pharmacy and with his support, we were finally able to launch our distribution program this year. We now serve as a naloxone access hub for faith communities and grassroots harm reduction groups across the state. Each month we distribute about 1,000 naloxone kits. However, many of the grassroots organizations we work with don't have access to these same resources and would never be able to establish their own distribution program, even though they are connected to those most in need. Senate Bill 296 would remove these barriers and save lives.

The barriers to naloxone access in Ohio are extreme and have drawn national attention. So much so that Faith in Public Life was invited to offer testimony in front of the FDA in order to demonstrate the many barriers grassroots programs face and the desperate need for naloxone deregulation in our country.

Additionally, several of our partners have been threatened with arrest for distributing fentanyl testing strips as part of their outreach. Under current law, paraphernalia is defined to include items used to test drugs, including fentanyl test strips. There are some cities and counties in Ohio that have very directly said that anyone found to possess fentanyl testing strips will be charged with possession of paraphernalia, even though public health departments in these same cities and counties regularly distribute fentanyl testing strips at events. The law should not be subjective. All Ohioans should be able to distribute this life saving tool without fear.

My call to ministry came back in 2004 when I lost the person I loved to an accidental overdose. I watched as clergy and the community struggled in the wake of his loss. I vowed to dedicate myself to

The logo for Faith in Public Life, featuring the word "FAITH" in large, bold, white capital letters above the words "IN PUBLIC LIFE" in smaller, white capital letters, all set against a solid red rectangular background.

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ensuring that this would never happen again. That people who are so deeply loved did not die needless deaths, so that the children of God would have the chance to survive. This issue is deeply personal for me and I believe the only faithful way forward is to pass life saving legislation like SB 296, because simply put, it should not be this difficult to save a life. Something must change.

On behalf of Faith in Public Life, we strongly support the passage of SB 296 and offer our support to move it through committee.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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