



Senate Bill 296 – Written Proponent Testimony
Senate Health Committee
April 6, 2022

Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Health Committee – my name is John Dawson, and I proud to serve as the President and CEO of Community for New Direction. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Senate Bill 296, legislation that would legalize the use of narcotic testing products, including fentanyl test strips, as well as deregulate naloxone to make it more accessible and widely available.

Community for New Direction (CND) is a non-profit providing prevention education services for youth ages 5-18, as well as mental health and substance use disorder treatment services for adults in Franklin County. CND serves well over 2000 people a year and serve as a bridge for families with our afterschool programs at three locations. We feed the kids a meal, provide prevention education, as well as recreation. This program significantly reduces or eliminates the time our children are without adult supervision. While working with these families, we often see broken homes due to opiate addiction. We also have a program to decrease gun violence, working primarily with teens and young adults who are most prone to gang life. Most of these clients are the result of children needing to provide for themselves and siblings due to addiction.

At CND, we have seen firsthand the toll that fentanyl has taken on our community. According to data from the Franklin County Coroner, 87% of the 855 overdose deaths in Franklin County were fentanyl-related in 2020. As CEO of this agency, I believe that we should make every effort to reduce the risk and save the lives of our opiate addicted people. I have watched our talented staff from psychiatrist to entry level counselors provide therapy with people who describe feeling hopeless. They say that they cannot quit using opiates for fear of withdrawal. We begin treating them with buprenorphine and they say they begin to feel better and for some they report having hope. We also provide every client Narcan training and a Narcan kit. We do this with the understanding that if they must use their kit, they can get another one. Our clients have reported saving lives of friends who overdosed on fentanyl.

Senate Bill 296 is a positive step forward to expand effective harm reduction strategies in order to save lives and reduce the number of fatal overdose deaths across our state and fully support its passage. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of this legislation. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.

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