



**HEARTLAND
CONFERENCE**
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
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SB 288

Proponent Testimony

Rev. David Long-Higgins

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Heartland Conference, United Church of Christ

February 28, 2022

Dear Chairman Manning, Vice-Chair McColley, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer proponent testimony for the Good Samaritan provisions of SB 288, as well as offering 3 additional amendments.

My name is Rev. David Long-Higgins and I serve as the Conference Minister of the Heartland Conference of the United Church of Christ, with care of over 313 UCC congregations throughout the State of Ohio. This legislation matters to me deeply because of the way it will free people to ask for help to save their lives without fear of repercussions from having drug paraphernalia when asking for life-saving help. My prayer is that no one should die because the law places a burden of choice between asking for help and risking arrest or not asking for help and risking death. In addition, I would urge your consideration of three additional amendments as follows:

1. Remove restrictions for those on parole and probation.
2. Remove limitations on how many times an individual can receive the immunity.
3. Remove treatment assessment requirements.

I believe these three amendments will significantly strengthen the intention to save lives for everyone, regardless of their prior history. I am also aware that we have a significantly overburdened system for treatment which should be prioritizing those who are ready to engage treatment and not dilute our current resources with the burden of additional assessments as a person's requirement for immunity from prosecution.

While some may believe that such provisions are simply a way to avoid prosecution, there is a much more nuanced reality that operates for many. It has to do with how family systems of support are financially and emotionally impacted when one is incarcerated because the law has not included the amendments described above. The reality is that when people have the broadest protection to call for help, they actually do call for help.

The system that we have right now is not working. There is far too much death from drug overdoses. Any law that can provide space for such a reality to be mitigated should be enacted. I urge you to do so for the good of Ohioans everywhere regardless of prior history and the frequency of need for immunity from prosecution.

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In over 33 years of ordained ministry, first as a local church pastor and now as the Conference Minister, I have been aware of and ministered to families impacted by drug overdose and death. Too often the refrain has been uttered, “If only they had called for help.” The enacting of these amendments will increase the likelihood that people at risk of drug overdose will call for help.

I believe God’s deep desire is for life and flourishing and calls the community to do what is in its power to increase the possibilities of life wherever possible. These amendments will help offer a bridge to life and increase the possibility of flourishing not only for individuals but also for families.

My concern if these expansions to the Good Samaritan law do not pass, is that we will continue the tragic spiral of drug overdose deaths which has placed our state among the top five for drug overdose deaths in the country. While there is no one approach that will remedy this reality, the enacting of these amendments can help us move in the right direction.

Again, let me reiterate my hope that the Good Samaritan law will be expanded to include freedom from prosecution for drug paraphernalia possession when one has called for help, that the Good Samaritan law will remove restrictions for those on parole and probation, that it will remove limitations on how many times an individual can receive the immunity, and that it will remove treatment assessment requirements which otherwise would further burdening an already overburdened assessment system.

Thank-you for your consideration of my testimony and for your willingness to act in ways that will further expand the possibilities of life for Ohioans.

Sincerely,

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