
Prevention Action Alliance

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Ohio Senate Senate Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee Prevention Action Alliance December 9, 2020

Good Afternoon, Chairman Hoagland, Vice Chair Schaffer, Ranking Member O'Brien, and members of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony as a proponent in consideration of Senate Bill 340 (SB 340). My name is Jean-Philippe Dorval, and I am the Advocacy and Public Policy Liaison for Prevention Action Alliance (PAA). PAA is a 32-year-old statewide nonprofit organization based in Columbus, Ohio. We are dedicated to leading healthy communities in the prevention of substance misuse and the promotion of mental health wellness. PAA offers a wealth of resources, training services, grants, and advocacy opportunities for those who are active in the prevention and mental health fields.

I would first like to thank Senators Kunze and Fedor, for understanding the importance of this issue and sponsoring this bill. As mentioned during sponsor testimony for this bill, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) is the term used to describe the range of birth defects caused by maternal alcohol consumption during pregnancy.

No amount of alcohol is safe to consume during pregnancy, there is no safe time to drink during pregnancy, and all types of alcohol are equally harmful. 2019 data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention tells us that 1 in 9 women drink during pregnancy, and in a time when alcohol sales are up and behavioral health issues are rising, it is fair for us to predict that the numbers for Ohio this last year will be even higher.

Bonnie and Thom Shuman, constituents of Senator Kunze and key partners in the development of this bill wanted to testify today but with the pandemic and their age, it was too much of a risk. In lieu of their testimony, I would like to share some of their story with you all.

Bonnie and Thom adopted their son Teddy, who has Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, at the age of 18 months. At that time, they were told to expect 'mild' developmental delays. However, it became increasingly clear that such delays were far more profound than first thought with Teddy exhibiting an increase in violent behavior and outbursts starting at the age of seven. They spent 15 years going from one psychiatric facility or unit to the next. Some were in-state and some were out-of-state. Regardless of the of the physical, financial, emotional, and spiritual hardship they endured, they fought tirelessly to help their son. Finally, in March 2006 their son was placed at the Columbus Developmental Center by order of the probate court, which has worked perfectly for them and their son, Teddy.

The public health strategy that this bill is built on is simple. Providing signage, with clear messaging, at the point of sale in the establishments of liquor permit holders will give women the information needed

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to make a safe and healthy decision if they are pregnant or trying to get pregnant. Data shows that signage at the point of sale is more effective than relying on the health warning labels on alcohol containers, and a University of Oregon study highlighted that drinking by pregnant women is down 11 percent in states requiring signage. In addition, that same study also found evidence of fewer premature births of babies at less than 32 weeks gestation and fewer births of babies weighing less than 3.5 pounds.

This bill is simple, it's non-punitive, and its intent is in line with the General Assembly's efforts to improve the health outcomes of our mothers and reduce the prevalence of infant mortality.

Chairman Hoagland, Vice Chair Schaffer, Ranking member O'Brien and members of the committee. I understand that we are nearing the end of this General Assembly, and my organization will be pushing for the reintroduction of this bill in both chambers in the next GA. I ask that you remember Bonnie and Thom's story, and that you think about the many other untold stories of parents and families that have lived experience from dealing with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.

Point of sale warning signs are an effective, low-cost approach to protecting the health of pregnant women and the babies they carry, and I hope that by the end of this committee, all of you see the value in that.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony as a proponent. I am happy to answer any questions the committee may have.