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SB 59 Proponent Testimony  
Senate Health Committee  
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Chairman Burke and Ranking Member Antonio, on behalf of The MetroHealth System I am pleased to offer testimony in support of Senate Bill 59. I would like to thank the sponsor of this bill, Senator Antonio, for bringing such important legislation forward to help address opioid overdose mortality in the state of Ohio.

My name is Emily Metz, and I serve as Harm Reduction Program Coordinator at The MetroHealth System. MetroHealth is the safety-net health system for Cuyahoga County caring for the most vulnerable members of our community. MetroHealth has a staff of over 7,500 that provides care at four hospitals, four emergency departments and more than 20 health centers and 40 additional sites throughout Northeast Ohio. At MetroHealth, we have seen how pervasive and destructive the opioid addiction and overdose crisis has been to our patients, our families, and our community. In 2017, MetroHealth established the Office of Opioid Safety, a department whose mission is to promote opioid safety throughout the hospital system and in the greater community through education, advocacy and treatment. Since 2013, we have operated MetroHealth's Cuyahoga County Project DAWN (Deaths Avoided with Naloxone) Program, an overdose education and naloxone distribution program which provides free naloxone and education to the public.

Project DAWN began as a pilot project initiated by the Ohio Department of Health with the mission to reduce opioid overdose mortality throughout Ohio communities by increasing access to naloxone for individuals at risk of opioid overdose and their family members and friends. Project DAWN programs provide program participants with free naloxone and educate program participants and the public on the risk factors for overdose, how to recognize the signs and symptoms of opioid overdose and how to respond to an opioid overdose and save a life using the opioid overdose antidote naloxone. We know that individuals at risk of opioid overdose have a greater chance of survival if they or individuals close to them have access to naloxone. We also know that communities which have access to naloxone have decreased opioid overdose mortality as compared to those communities that do not have public access to naloxone. Furthermore, research has shown that 26% of individuals who experience an overdose seek treatment for their addiction within 30 days of their overdose. However, if individuals lose their lives to an overdose, they will never have the opportunity to seek help and recover.

Since 2007, unintentional drug overdose became the leading cause of unintentional injury death in Ohio. In 2017, our state lost 4,854 lives due to drug overdose, largely associated with opioids. While the overdose death rate rose by over 1,000% between 2000 and 2017 in Ohio, driven by prescription opioids, heroin and now synthetic opioids like fentanyl, there have also been thousands of lives saved across Ohio because of public access to naloxone. These victories are, in part, due to the expansion of naloxone access in our communities supported by legislation that was signed into law such as House Bill 170, from the 130<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, and House Bill 4, from the 131<sup>st</sup> General Assembly. House Bill 4 allows programs like Project DAWN to operate under a physician standing order protocol enabling programs to stretch resources removing the need for a physician to



be present when furnishing naloxone to the public. This allowed Project DAWN programs across Ohio to work more efficiently and get more naloxone into the hands of those who need it. HB 4 also increased access to naloxone across Ohio by allowing pharmacists and pharmacy interns to furnish naloxone to individuals without requiring a prescription for naloxone. SB 59 will build upon these laws by requiring the Pharmacy Board to develop a program to educate pharmacists about these standing orders to dispense naloxone.

Since 2013, MetroHealth's Cuyahoga County Project DAWN has distributed over 14,000 naloxone kits to the public with over 2,414 reported rescues. While Project DAWN programs are critical to saving lives across Ohio, Project DAWN programs cannot alone serve as the primary resource for naloxone access across our state. In fact, 29 of the 88 counties across Ohio do not have a Project DAWN program. According to the Ohio Pharmacy Board's records of pharmacies which have a protocol for dispensing naloxone without a prescription, there are an average of 3 pharmacies dispensing naloxone without a prescription in the counties across Ohio without a Project DAWN program.

While Ohio has come a long way in increasing naloxone access to the public, there is still much work to be done to remove the remaining barriers to naloxone access across our communities. It is critical for naloxone to be available to every Ohioan in need at every possible access point. Pharmacies can help fulfill this need. However, there still exists misconceptions and misunderstandings about the ability of pharmacies to dispense naloxone to the public without a prescription under an approved protocol. Since the passage of HB 4 into law, approximately 77 percent of Ohio's pharmacies in 87 of the state's 88 counties now have standing orders in place and have registered with the State of Ohio Board of Pharmacy to provide naloxone without a prescription. We have an opportunity to close this gap by educating Ohio pharmacies. Senate Bill 59 would provide necessary education about the authority of pharmacists and pharmacy interns to dispense naloxone without a prescription to holders of licenses issued by the Ohio Pharmacy Board; registered pharmacy technicians and certified pharmacy technicians registered by the Board; and other individuals who are employed by license holders. This in turn could help increase the percentage of pharmacies across Ohio who adopt a protocol to furnish naloxone without a prescription to individuals in need.

SB 59 will strengthen and expand upon the work that is being done at our Ohio pharmacies and give individuals at risk of opioid overdose a second chance at life and recovery.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to provide testimony, and for all that the Committee is doing to address overdose mortality. The MetroHealth System supports SB 59 and believes that it will save lives across Ohio. Thank you.