



SB 59
Proponent Testimony
Blyth Barnow, MDiv
Harm Reduction Faith Coordinator
Faith In Public Life
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Chairman Burke, Vice-Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Committee, thank you for allowing me to speak with you today in support of Senate Bill 59 which will decrease overdose deaths in our state. My name is Blyth Barnow, I am a minister with Faith In Public Life, and I work with faith communities and people who use drugs to respond to the current overdose crisis. I myself have needlessly lost people I love to overdose and I thank Senator Antonio for introducing this important piece of legislation.

As you know, Ohio has the 2nd highest overdose death rate in the country. As faith leaders we have seen this crisis up close. We have buried far too many members of our congregations and lost too many members of our own families. We know we can do more to ease the grief and suffering of God's people, which is all people.

We are losing thousands of Ohioans every year to unnecessary deaths. This is why I support Senate Bill 59. Ensuring that Pharmacists are properly educated about their authority to distribute naloxone without a prescription and ensuring that pharmacies are properly stocking this medication is an easy way to save lives.

Abundant distribution of naloxone is key to decreasing overdose deaths in our state. Under section 4729.44 of the Ohio Revised Code, Ohioans have been assured that they can obtain naloxone at a pharmacy without a prescription only to be regularly turned away when they finally reach out.

Too often pharmacists are either unaware of the legislation which allows them to distribute naloxone without a prescription or they do not have the life saving medication in stock.

In fact, in preparation for my testimony today I called my pharmacy to see if they would distribute naloxone to me without a prescription. I was told by the managing pharmacist that they were not legally allowed to do so and that I would need a prescription in order to obtain naloxone from them. When I informed them about the change in legislation I was told that they were not made aware of any such changes and was once again told that I needed to have a prescription in order to obtain naloxone.

Countless Ohioans have been touched by the unnecessary loss of a loved one to a fatal overdose. The pain stays with us as we think about what we could have done to keep them alive. It is cruel to ask people to bear the brunt of this grief when we have the tools we need to help our loved ones survive.

When you give someone naloxone, you give them hope. Hope of resurrecting their loved ones, their communities, and themselves. It is a small way to regain some power and agency in the face of overwhelming grief.

These changes cannot wait. The lives of Ohioans depend on it. As faith leaders we know that all people are beloved by God and every life is worth saving. Please help us to save our communities by passing Senate Bill 59 and ensuring that section 4729.44 of the Ohio Revised Code is properly and adequately enforced.

Thank you for your time. I am happy to respond to any questions you may have.