



**Proponent Testimony on Senate Bill 25
House Criminal Justice Committee
March 3, 2022**

Thank You Chairman LaRe, Vice Chairman Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland, and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee for the opportunity to give testimony on this very important Senate Bill 25, The Relapse Reduction Act. I also want to thank Senator Gavarone for sponsoring this bill.

I am Thomas Stuber and I present today as the President of the Ohio Alliance of Recovery Providers (OARP), an organization of over 40 of the largest Addiction Treatment and Prevention Agencies throughout Ohio. OARP strongly endorses this legislation. I am also President a of The LCADA Way, the largest behavioral health agency specializing in substance use disorder treatment and prevention in Lorain, Medina, and Erie Counties. As a field, it is our responsibility to ensure that those suffering from addiction receive treatment in a safe, drug-free setting.

Individuals suffering from addiction have had significant changes to the structure and function of their brain. The flooding of neurotransmitters including dopamine in the pleasure center of the brain ultimately results in intense craving and drug seeking. This craving and drug seeking is stronger than many of our basic instincts. It has proven stronger than our maternal instincts. We have seen women in their eighth and ninth month of pregnancy sign out of treatment against medical advice because the craving is so strong. I have not known a single individual addicted to opiates who has not known someone who has overdosed and died and yet they continue to use. So, it is even stronger than our survival instinct. This is supposed to be our strongest instinct.

Craving is part of post-acute withdrawal, a normal part of recovery. When the addicted individual ceases using alcohol and drugs, the body goes through withdrawal. During this time, all organs affected by the drugs will attempt to return to normal. This is often a painful process of readjustment, but most organs will return to normal functioning within five to eleven days. That is, all organs except the brain. The brain will go through episodes of readjustment which could take anywhere from 35 weeks to two years. It is during these episodes that the individual will experience intense craving and anxiety. This is a major cause of relapse. It takes total abstinence from drugs for the brain to begin to heal.

This bill is extremely important to ensure that we have an opportunity to provide care in an environment that protects our patients/clients while they are trying to recover from this life-

threatening disease. It comes at a very critical time as we struggle with the behavioral health crisis exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. And it is critical to remember that we are still in an opiate/opioid epidemic. Overdose deaths in Ohio have surged. After two years of declining overdose deaths, this past year we have seen overdose deaths in Ohio increase by more than 20% over 2017 overdose deaths, which previously been the worst in Ohio.

SB 25 will address two critical issues that will support treatment providers' efforts to provide safe and effective treatment:

1. By enhancing penalties for drug trafficking offenses in the vicinity of addiction treatment services, there will be a safe zone for our patients. Our patients/clients are extremely vulnerable to relapse during the early stages of recovery. Their drug dealers know this and they do not want to lose their paying customers. They prey upon our patients at this most critical time. This bill will provide greater safety while the person is receiving treatment. It will also increase penalties to those dealers who attempt to recruit new customers from treatment centers.
2. By addressing the potential to defraud alcohol and drug screenings, there will be increased motivation for our patients to remain drug-free during the course of treatment. I believe that no one wants to be addicted and while many struggle with recovery, at least early on in treatment, this supports the message that there are consequences to addictive behaviors. It is also another tool to help them get through those episodes of craving and anxiety and ultimately achieve successful recovery.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to address this most critical issue and for your consideration of tools and methods that will impact the opiate/opioid epidemic.

If you have additional questions regarding this testimony, I can be reached at 440-669-0723.

Thank You.