

March 24, 2022

Ohio House Criminal Justice Committee

Chairman LaRe

RE: SB25 Opponent Testimony

Thank you Chairman LaRe, Vice chair Swearingen, Ranking member Leland and the members of the House Criminal Justice Committee for permitting me a few minutes today to share my opinion.

I believe it is best that I first share with you my experience with addiction caused by schedule I and II substances. I have been surrounded by chemical addictions my entire life. I have watched in horror and tragically lost: My cousin Dirk - My nephew Andy - My stepson Zac – My only brother Ron, and my firstborn son Daniel. All to Opioid addiction. Four of those five started with prescription opioids.

The Ohio Alliance for Innovation in Population Health at Ohio University published a study in 2019 about the number of life years lost in Ohio from 2009 to 2018 from this epidemic. Its findings were that more than one million life years have been lost. My family lost 160 life years.

Why did this happen? This opioid epidemic was first recognized by the State of Ohio around 2010, A former Ohio Attorney General has openly shared these four facts:

- *“The average opioid prescription in 1997 was 7 pills.”*
- *“By the year 2010 the average opioid prescription grew to 65 pills. Nearly a 900 % increase.”*
- *“4 out of 5 Heroin users started with prescription opioids.”*
- *“The pain med problem is fueling the Heroin epidemic.”*

Currently, the State of Ohio’s Prescription Drug Monitoring program called OARRS contains a Yearly Legislative report. This report states that the average opioid prescription is currently 60 pills.

Please note that a prescription opioid is a schedule II substance, which is the most dangerous substance permitted to be sold. A schedule II substance carries this definition:

- **Substances with a high potential for abuse, with use , potentially leading to severe psychological and physical dependance.**

Please also note that the Primary Medical Brain Disease of addiction is considered in the medical journals as: **Chronic and Progressive, if left untreated can be fatal.**

When I lost my oldest son Daniel to this epidemic, I had not yet made the strong connection between Prescription Opioids and Heroin. Folks, I learned too late, that they are nearly one in the same, as to how they affect the brain once ingested.

I wished, someone would have educated me, two decades ago, about what addiction is, and is not. I carry a lot of remorse now, knowing I have made some very bad mistakes, as a parent, as a family member, towards those that battled this disease in real time in front of me.

I wished, I had understood this simple medical conclusion about addiction: For a medical condition to be elevated, or classified as a disease, it must pass three criteria. For example: Fibromyalgia, is not classified as a medical disease. But addiction is classified as a medical disease, in the medical journals. This is not an opinion based statement. It’s a proven scientific fact. I hope that grabbed your curiosity.

The three criteria, required for a medical condition to be classified or elevated to a medical disease:

1. It must be detrimental to your health. (addiction is often fatal, if left untreated)
2. There must be a specific set of signs and symptoms. (with addiction there is)

The most important criteria is number 3

3. There must be a medical test when given is always abnormal.

With addictions to chemicals there is clearly a medical test. That test is a brain scan. Someone in the throws of addiction, weeks sober will often show substantial reduced brain activity, in its frontal lobe area, when compared to someone not battling addiction. Your frontal lobes controls your cognitive decision making processes.

Most people look at addiction as a simple daily choice by an individual. That is not the case once the disease stage begins. Addiction to schedule I and II substances is chronic and progressive, like cancer. An example to this statement: Let's say all members of this Committees started smoking at 18 years old. A number of you will develop lung cancer. A number of you will not. The reason for this is genetics. You have very little – if any control in who develops cancer and who does not. The same basic theory works for who develops addictions, and who does not.

Please note that there are two other potential factors involved in developing addiction, beside genetics;

2. Untreated or under treated mental health disorders, such as anxiety–depression– ADHD- etc
3. Over exposure to schedule I or II substances.

These three factors are the significant causes to how the Primary Medical Brain disease called Addiction develops.

I do understand this committee is the criminal justice committee. Because of that, I suspect it is easy to focus solely on deterrents, using criminal punishment. I can only suggest that one should examine the past criminal enhancements, over each of the past General Assemblies, to gauge how effective they have been, or not have been. The statistics do not support that the past criminal enhancements have decreased the death statistics and carnage caused by this epidemic. I hope that the legislative motives here are not driven by the desire to use these types of efforts, as bullets points for political campaigns.

I do also understand everyone has their mind made up on this bill. That's OK too. No harm done. I'm here to plea with this Committee and the entire General Assembly legislative members to in the future, focus equal time towards improving the educational effort to all of society in order to reduce the stigma of this man made epidemic and towards improving the dysfunctional treatment system.

Instead of drafting legislation pushed by folks that take a paycheck from some of the systems I call dysfunctional. Reach out and talk to citizens that have close family member experiences within Ohios OBOT treatment systems about some of the dysfunctions inside these systems.

There are many other things that could be done towards “relapse reduction” and to “improve treatment” issues. Enhanced penalties will not cause any measurable positive gains for anyone, on both sides of this epidemic. We have done this since the Reagan days and we are losing the battle each year.

One of the main keys to reducing the stigma of addiction, and improving treatment options to addiction, is with education of what addiction is and isn't to everyone. I hope and pray all legislators will make that a priority in the near future.

Thank you for your time today, as well as your future consideration to my plea.

Scott Weidle

[Our Journey - Daniel's Story \(danielsstory.org\)](http://danielsstory.org)

[Little Boy Lost - Daniel's Story \(danielsstory.org\)](http://danielsstory.org)