



PREVENT. PROMOTE. PROTECT.

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May 18, 2022

House Criminal Justice Committee
Honorable Jeff LaRE
77 South High Street, 13th Floor
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Please find this letter as proponent testimony for HB 456 – Decriminalizing Fentanyl Drug Testing Strips.

As you are aware, the introduction of fentanyl into the supply of street drugs has created major issues for those suffering from the disease of addiction and more recently, recreational drug users. As a cheap, powerful and accessible drug, often imported from China and delivered through our southern borders, fentanyl has caused numerous overdoses and ultimately, deaths. As a public health agency operating a successful harm reduction program throughout our region, fentanyl test strips are a crucial component of our program. The principles of harm reduction underscore the use of test strips as lifesaving method if someone alters behavior based on knowledge of fentanyl's presence.

Several of our clients have reported finding fentanyl in their drug supplies through the use of the testing strips. Without prior knowledge of fentanyl in their supplies, users often dose themselves as they have done previously. Given the power of fentanyl, it takes very little of the drug to cause a deadly overdose.

Our preliminary data indicates that 75% of users altered their drug use behavior upon finding their supply is tainted with fentanyl; a finding that is supported elsewhere in the literature. This could mean using a smaller dose; consuming drugs in the presence of others for safety; carrying a supply of the overdose reversing drug, naloxone; not using at all; or combinations of these behaviors. We very recently had an overdose episode present at our harm reduction site. The patient was dropped off in front of our team after someone approached our staff worried his friend was overdosing. They were not our clients, but heard we provided naloxone. Fortunately, our highly-trained team administered naloxone, called 911, and began CPR, ultimately saving a life.

Following is testimony from some of the many partners throughout Hamilton County working with us to distribute fentanyl test strips:

“When we were initially approached with the idea of offering fentanyl test strips we were a little skeptical, as we wrongly assumed that drug use wasn't an issue that affected us or our guests. Far more fentanyl test strips are being used than what we could have anticipated and we're grateful to the Hamilton County Health Department program for assisting us in fully understanding the scope of this issue and addressing it in a way that feels discreet and organic to our particular business. The training sessions were key to helping us understand that these



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drug use issues affect people from all walks of life and also understanding our role in helping prevent overdose deaths. We're happy to be a part of this initiative to directly save lives and end the stigma surrounding drug use and its effects on our community."

Hamilton County Bar Manager

"These test strips are portable and easy to use. Whether you're battling addiction or just taking these illicit drugs recreationally, these test strips are another tool to saving lives"

Hamilton County mother who lost one child to addiction and is working to save second child from a similar fate.

In summary, for whatever reason, fentanyl test strips have been codified as illegal drug paraphernalia. Times have changed and the introduction of fentanyl into street drug supplies has created significant harm among those in active addiction as well as people who use recreationally. As Hamilton County Health Commissioner, I urge you to pass HB 456 so that we can legally use these products to save lives and give people yet another chance to beat addiction.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "G. Kesterman", with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Greg Kesterman
Health Commissioner
Hamilton County Public Health