



**Dr. Joan Papp**  
**Director of Office Opioid Safety - Emergency Medicine**  
**The MetroHealth System**  
**HB 456 -Proponent Testimony**  
**House Criminal Justice Committee**  
**May 25, 2022**

Chair LaRe, Vice Chair White, Ranking Member LeLand, thank you for providing The MetroHealth System located in Cleveland, Ohio the opportunity to provide proponent testimony to House Bill 456, a Bill to decriminalize fentanyl drug testing strips.

My name is Dr. Joan Papp and I am the Director of Office Opioid Safety at The MetroHealth System. We are the safety-net health system for Cuyahoga County, caring for the most unresourced members of our community. MetroHealth's more than 7,800 employees provide care at four hospitals, four emergency departments, more than 20 health centers and 40 additional sites throughout Northeast Ohio. In the past year, MetroHealth has served 300,000 patients at more than 1.4 million visits. Seventy-five percent of our patients are uninsured or covered by Medicare or Medicaid.

As outlined in the Bill Analysis – the Bill:

- Provides that the offense of “illegal use or possession of drug paraphernalia” does not apply to a person’s use, or possession with purpose to use, any drug testing strips to determine the presence of fentanyl or a fentanyl-related compound.

The MetroHealth System supports HB 456 because the opioid epidemic has not showed any signs of abating, in fact since the start of the pandemic the country has seen it highest overdose fatalities with a 15.9% increase nationwide between October 2020- September 2021.

Thanks to Ohio’s current naloxone access laws, our state was less impacted with only a 6.6% *increase* overall compared to less prepared states during that same time period. Because of Ohio’s current naloxone access laws, our Office of Opioid Safety was able to:

- distribute nearly 6,500 naloxone kits,
- reverse 1,647 overdoses, and
- install 84 public naloxone access boxes throughout Cuyahoga County in 2021 alone.

What we have done in Ohio, and what we continue to do, is working and we are saving lives in the face of an ever -changing landscape of the opioid epidemic. There are however, a just a few barriers to access that remain. Fentanyl continues to be a pervasive threat- mixed with cocaine, methamphetamine and benzodiazepines it can be disguised as pills or other substances to trick the user into becoming addicted to or overdose on fentanyl. Fentanyl test strips can prevent this by allowing the user to check a drug supply for its presence preventing a fatal overdose. Research has shown that 45 % of individuals will reduce the amount they use after a positive result. Fentanyl test strips and naloxone are vital tools we need to combat the changing landscape of the opioid epidemic and this bill eliminates the few remaining barriers to access these tools. We strongly support this bill.

Chair LaRe, Vice Chair White, Ranking Member LeLand, and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee thank you for providing me the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 456.

I'll be happy to answer any questions the committee may have.

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### **About The MetroHealth System**

The MetroHealth System is redefining health care by going beyond medical treatment to improve the foundations of community health and well-being: affordable housing, a cleaner environment, economic opportunity and access to fresh food, convenient transportation, legal help and other services. The system strives to become as good at preventing disease as it is at treating it.

The system's more than 600 doctors, 1,700 nurses and 7,800 employees go to work each day with a mission of service, to their patients and to the community. As Cuyahoga County's safety-net health system, MetroHealth plays an essential role in the region, caring for anyone and everyone, regardless of an ability to pay.

Founded in 1837, MetroHealth operates four hospitals, four emergency departments and more than 20 health centers and 40 additional sites throughout Cuyahoga County. The system serves more than 300,000 patients, two-thirds of whom are uninsured or covered by Medicare or Medicaid.

MetroHealth is home to Cuyahoga County's most experienced Level I Adult Trauma Center, verified since 1992, and Ohio's only adult and pediatric trauma and burn center.

As an academic medical center, MetroHealth is committed to research and to teaching and training tomorrow's caregivers. Each active staff physician holds a faculty appointment at Case

Western Reserve University School of Medicine. Its main campus hospital houses the Cleveland Metropolitan School District's Lincoln-West School of Science & Health, the only high school in America located inside a hospital.

Knowing that good health is about much more than good medical care, MetroHealth has launched the Institute for H.O.P.E.™ (Health, Opportunity, Partnership, Empowerment), which uses a coordinated, collaborative and strategic approach to help patients with non-medical needs such as healthy food, stable housing and job training.

The MetroHealth Glick Center, a new 11-floor hospital, is under construction on the system's main campus in Cleveland and is scheduled to welcome its first patients in October 2022. The billion-dollar project is the cornerstone of a wider neighborhood revitalization effort led by the system and its partners in the community.

For more information, visit [metrohealth.org](https://metrohealth.org).