

**House Criminal Justice Committee  
House Bill 456**

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Chairman LaRe, Vice Chairwoman White, Ranking Member Leland, and Members of the House Criminal Justice Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of House Bill 456, which would decriminalize fentanyl test strips in Ohio.

My name is Kelsey Schmuhl and I am an Assistant Professor of Clinical Pharmacy at The Ohio State University College of Pharmacy as well as a Patient Care Pharmacist at Nationwide Children's Hospital where I support the Division of Adolescent Medicine and specifically our Substance Use Treatment and Recovery program. In my practice I work as part of an interdisciplinary team to provide care for adolescents and young adults with substance use disorders. Our team has the privilege of walking alongside patients through their substance use journeys, which often have many difficult and rewarding moments. Regardless of where a patient presents in their disease, harm reduction strategies, including fentanyl test strips, are essential to our treatment approach.

In 2015, I stood before the House Health and Aging Committee as well as the Senate Health and Human Services Committee as a student pharmacist to provide testimony on a harm reduction bill that increased access to naloxone through Ohio pharmacies. Since House Bill 4 was signed into law, over 1,600 pharmacies in Ohio have a protocol in place to dispense naloxone without a prescription and I believe we will never know the full extent of lives saved due to that legislation. A lot has changed since 2015, but our mission remains the same. Keep Ohioans alive and help them reach their fullest potential. So, I am back now to ask for your support House Bill 456, which would build upon our previous efforts to combat the opioid epidemic and keep Ohioans alive and healthy.

While the opioid epidemic continues to devastate our communities, we have also seen a dramatic rise in deaths caused by potent, synthetic opioids such as fentanyl. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention over 56,000 people died from synthetic opioid overdoses in 2020, a more than 18-fold increase in such deaths compared to 2013. And unfortunately, we also know that overdose deaths also increased during the COVID-19 Pandemic. What makes fentanyl particularly dangerous is the fact that it is 50-100 times more potent than morphine, meaning that it takes a very small amount to cause a fatal overdose. Even more concerning is the fact that fentanyl is being mixed with other drugs without the user's knowledge.

You will recall the tragic deaths of two Ohio State students earlier this year from accidental fentanyl poisoning after taking what appeared to be fake Adderall pills. As a faculty member at Ohio State and an advocate for increasing access to harm reduction tools on campus, this story hits close to home. In both the academic and medical roles in my job, I am lucky enough to work with adolescents and young adults. I feel honored to work with these individuals during such a unique time in their lives as they are finding their own identities and passions. I am also keenly aware that risk-taking behavior peaks during this time and that adolescents are more likely to make impulsive decisions especially during emotionally

heightened situations. For these reasons, it is extremely important to me to keep my patients and students safe, and one way I can help prevent harm is by equipping them with fentanyl test strips.

One of the key principles of a harm reduction approach is meeting people where they are, not where we want them to be. By increasing access to harm reduction tools such as fentanyl test strips we are acknowledging that drug use is a part of our society and that we are working to decrease its negative consequences using evidence based strategies. Harm reduction does not enable drug use and it does not increase drug use. Harm reduction keeps people alive and provides critical access to the healthcare system for a patient population that often does not seek out healthcare due to fear and stigma. By supporting House Bill 456 we are showing Ohioans that we value their lives and are encouraging them to embrace a harm reduction approach that will help their friends and neighbors in need. In a time where fentanyl related overdoses are causing so much harm in our communities, it is essential that we come together and use every tool available to us to combat the problem.

Chairman LaRe, thank you again for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 456. At this time, I would be happy to answer any questions.