



## Hamilton County Heroin Coalition Task Force



### Ohio House Homeland Security Committee

October 18, 2023

### Proponent Testimony on HB230

Chairman Ghabari, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Thomas, and Esteemed Members of the House Homeland Security Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 230. I am Tom Fallon, a dedicated law enforcement officer with a 34-year tenure in Ohio. Over the past eight and a half years, I have had the honor of serving as the Commander of the Hamilton County Heroin Task Force and Quick Response Team. I also hold the position of Legislative Chair for the Ohio Task Force Commanders Association. Tasked with responding to the overwhelming crisis of overdose deaths in Hamilton County between 2013 and 2015, I was entrusted by the Hamilton County Association of Chiefs of Police to establish a task force aimed at investigating overdose deaths back to the supplier, holding drug dealers accountable for the loss of lives within our community. To date, we have investigated over 1,600 overdose deaths.

I also oversee the Hamilton County Quick Response Team, a groundbreaking initiative where law enforcement officers collaborate with trained navigators to offer a range of community-based services, addressing issues such as substance use, mental health, homelessness, and other needs-based services. I am proud to report a 16% reduction in overdose deaths in Hamilton County from 2021 to 2022, a testament to our comprehensive community-based response.

Today, I stand before you in strong support of HB230. For too long, Ohio has borne the brunt of the national overdose death crisis. According to the Ohio Department of Health, our state witnessed a staggering increase in unintentional overdose deaths, rising from 1,914 lives lost in 2012 to 5,018 lives taken in 2022—an alarming 262% increase. In 2021, fentanyl played a pivotal role in 80% of Ohio's unintentional drug overdose deaths. While the early stages of the epidemic saw fentanyl primarily introduced into the heroin drug supply, more recent trends indicate its prevalence in various recreational drug sources. This shift has led to an alarming doubling of unintentional drug overdose deaths in Ohio's Black Non-Hispanic and Hispanic populations from 2016 to 2021. The period from 2020 to 2021 also saw a 15% increase in unintentional drug overdose deaths among Black non-Hispanic Ohioans, the most substantial increase among reported racial and ethnic groups.

In Hamilton County, despite recent reductions, our unintentional overdose deaths have surged by 212%—from 204 lives lost in 2012 to 433 in 2022. The devastating impact of Carfentanil, which claimed 570 lives in 2017, a year we will never forget. The number of family members I have talked to, consoled, and referred to Al-Anon and other much needed family counseling daily, paints the picture of the pain of this epidemic.

The Ohio Task Force Commanders Association and I strongly support the provisions of HB230 that focus on increased penalties for drug trafficking, particularly concerning heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine, and fentanyl. While we view the proposed five-year mandatory sentence for individuals convicted in fentanyl-related deaths as a positive step, it remains far too low compared to sentences handed down in federal court. Our task force historically pursues overdose death cases in federal court first due to the judicial discretion to apply any sentence in state court. This mandatory five-year sentence harmonizes with ORC 2925.02 Corrupting



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another with Drugs, which carries a minimum one-year sentence and is a statute our task force uses regularly on non-fatal overdoses. It is important to emphasize that this bill strictly targets drug dealers responsible for the loss of life and does not punish low-level offenders who often struggle with addiction.

Many Ohio Drug Task Forces, including ours, deal with investigations related to human trafficking. We recognize how intertwined the illegal drug trade is with the human trafficking, both within and beyond our state's borders. The bill's expanded definition of human trafficking, coupled with the new provision regarding "participating in an organization or operation for trafficking in persons," along with mandatory sentencing, provides another tool for our investigators and prosecutors in combating human trafficking and enforcing appropriate minimum sentences.

In closing, I urge you to support House Bill 230, a vital step in addressing the overdose crisis in Ohio. The devastation caused by this epidemic transcends statistics and numbers—it touches the lives of our citizens and families on a profound level. The provisions outlined in this bill are necessary to combat the root causes of this crisis and ensure that those who perpetuate it are held accountable.

Respectfully Submitted,

Tom Fallon