



Hamilton County Heroin Coalition Task Force



Ohio House Ways and Means Committee May 7, 2024 Proponent Testimony on HB451

Chairman Roemer, Vice Chair Lorenz, Ranking Member Troy and Esteemed Members of the House Ways and Means Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 451. I am Tom Fallon, a dedicated law enforcement officer with 35-year tenure in Ohio. Over the past nine 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 peer 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/poisoning deaths in Hamilton County from 2021 to 2022, and a 9% decrease from 2022 to 2023, a testament to our comprehensive community-based response.

Today, I stand before you in strong support of HB451. 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. In the US, we have averaged in excess of 100,000 overdose/poisoning deaths each of the last two years. While our death toll continues to climb in the US, the Mexican National Drug Trafficking Organizations are profiting billions of dollars annually.

The Ohio Task Force Commanders Association and I strongly support the provisions of HB451, which is designed to address illicit activity related to international wire transfers, particularly those involving drug cartels, human trafficking, and illegal immigration. This is an excellent tool to combat the cartels smuggling drugs and illegal immigrants crossing our borders. It is widely known from our federal partners, that most all of the many variants of fentanyl and the historically most potent methamphetamine are entering our country through the southern border. The cartel smuggled drugs end up on the streets of Ohio, killing our residents at record numbers and devastating thousands of Ohio families each year. Ohio Task Forces see in their investigations, the profits of drug sales funneled back to Mexico and the border states via various wire transfer services. Our Ohio task forces are on the front line battling Mexican National Drug Trafficking Organizations and strongly support this tool to lessen the cartel profits and make Ohio less desirable for organized criminal conduct by the cartels and their allies.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on this issue, and I am happy to take any questions.

Respectfully Submitted,

Tom Fallon