

Jan 24, 2024

Dear Chair Owens and Members of the Kansas House Corrections & Juvenile Justice Committee,

Re: In support of HB 2487

My name is Aonya Kendrick Barnett and I am the director of Safe Streets Wichita. Safe Streets Wichita is a coalition of people with lived and living experiences dedicated to preventing substance use and reducing harm in Kansas's overdose epidemic. Our efforts have been recognized by the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE), which awarded the organization an Overdose Data 2 Action (OD2A) grant to reduce opioid misuse and overdoses in Wichita and Sedgwick County. Our efforts to combat the overdose crisis led to the establishment of the first community-based naloxone program. We are the boots on the ground. I urge you to pass the Good Samaritan Fatal Overdose Protection Bill. As someone who has witnessed the devastating effects of drug overdoses, I cannot stress enough the importance of this legislation.

Firstly, this bill is essential for promoting health equity. It is no secret that drug overdoses affect specific communities more than others. Black and Hispanic communities, for example, are disproportionately impacted by overdose deaths. By providing legal protections for those who call for help during an overdose, this bill would encourage more people to seek help and save lives, regardless of the person's race or ethnicity.

Secondly, this bill is a critical component of harm reduction. Overdoses are often fatal because people are afraid to call for help due to fear of legal repercussions. By removing this fear, the Good Samaritan Fatal Overdose Protection Bill would encourage people to seek help and reduce the number of overdose deaths in Kansas. We recommend adding provisions to ensure that individuals are not penalized for violating probation or parole, breaching a restraining order, or having their property subjected to civil forfeiture.

Thirdly, Kansas has a high overdose rate compared to other states. In 2020 alone, there were over 400 overdose deaths in the state. This number is unacceptable and highlights the need for public health responses to the drug overdose crisis. The Good Samaritan Fatal Overdose Protection Bill is one such response, and it is a crucial step towards reducing overdose deaths in Kansas.

Passing the Good Samaritan Fatal Overdose Protection Bill would significantly impact the health and well-being of the people of Kansas. This bill would promote health equity, harm reduction, and public health responses to the drug overdose crisis. I urge you to support this legislation and save lives in our state.

Sincerely,
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