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Proponent Testimony – HB2328

Erika Holliday with the Unified Government of Wyandotte County Public Health Department

House Committee on Corrections and Juvenile Justice

February 14, 2023

Chair Owens and Members of the Committee,

My name is Erika Holliday, and I am a Public Health Practitioner who serves as the Substance Use Coordinator at the Wyandotte County Health Department in Kansas City, KS.

I started working directly with people with substance use disorder in 2015. That is the year fentanyl heavily entered into the street drug scene. Fentanyl is an opioid that is 50-100x the strength of morphine. People began entering my office voicing fear and concern that this was a new, powerful drug that affected their body and increased their risk of overdose in a way that they were not prepared for. However, their active addiction denied them the capability to avoid encountering fentanyl.

As I've continued this work, the presence of fentanyl is now not only affecting community members who use opioids, but stimulant users as well. Fentanyl is increasingly being unexpectedly found in batches of meth and cocaine. Now, people who have relied on stimulants to function and have never had a risk of overdose and overdose death have no idea if such is in their future. In the past 2 years I have been in spaces that give out fentanyl test strips legally, and people are coming and begging for the resource, wanting to be as responsible as possible to save the life of themselves and their loved ones at risk of overdose.

I am in support of HB2328 because I have personally seen the lifesaving measures it can produce, and these lifesaving resources are desperately needed in Kansas. Since 2020 the overdoses in Wyandotte County due to fentanyl occurrence in stimulants have more than quadrupled. The county overdoses in general have increased by 146%. Legalizing fentanyl testing strips would allow drug users to use these substances more cautiously and responsibly, therefore, preventing overdose and overdose deaths.

Additionally, Wyandotte County has seen a specific increase in overdose in youth due to a counterfeit pill increase. These are not chronic drug users, but rather teenagers who are trying new substances, as teens do. The primary difference between those experimenting today, versus those who were similarly experimenting 10, 20, or 30 years ago, is that now this type of experimentation can kill immediately. Legalizing and normalizing the use of fentanyl test strips will allow our youth to partake in this behavior responsibly and will be effective in teaching how dangerous this type of partying can be.

I urge you to vote in favor of HB2328. I can be reached via email at erholliday@wycokck.org or (573) 489-2339 if you would like additional information on the strong empirical support for fentanyl test strips and other strategies that can prevent overdoses and save lives, increase access to care for people with substance use disorders, and reduce the stigma of mental health and substance use issues.

Sincerely,

Erika Holliday

Substance Use Coordinator, Unified Government of Wyandotte County Public Health Department