

February 13, 2023

Testimony of Anthony J. Strickland, MD, FASAM in support of HB 2390.

Chair and Committee members, thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. My name is Dr. Anthony Joe Strickland, MD, FASAM and I am here today to testify in SUPPORT of HB 2390.

I am dually board certified in Family Medicine and Addiction Medicine and have over 8 years of experience in directly serving the people of Kansas in the treatment of substance use disorders. As a physician and as a Kansan, I have dedicated my career to serving those in our community who are most in need. I have extensive experience in direct patient care as an addiction medicine specialist as well as healthcare administration in regard to impacts of strategies to combat the opioid epidemic. I have served as the medical director of the substance abuse treatment centers of DCCCA for 8 years, medical director and chief medical officer of a federally qualified community health center, Chief medical officer of a community hospital, medical director of a company that assists in helping individuals with substance use disorders successfully transition out of the prison system and mitigate relapse and recidivism, and I also have my own private practice through which I serve this population of individuals and act as a consultant for other agencies in developing policies and procedures to deliver this care effectively and efficiently. I am the Treasurer of the Midwest Society of Addiction Medicine and member of the American Society of Addiction medicine.

In addition to serving Kansas, I am also licensed in Missouri and help a number of patients there. I have witnessed firsthand some of the benefits of increasing access to naloxone and testing supplies.

One patient, who we will call Allie, has been in sustained recovery for well over 2 years. Due to a policy like one outlined in HB 2390, Allie was able to obtain naloxone which she keeps around at all times. She tells me “If you had a potentially fatal bee allergy, and so did many of the other people you know, you would carry an EpiPen. This is no different.” Last year on labor day weekend, she was enjoying the lake with her friends and family. She left the campsite to go get gas for the boat. While she was gone, her 16 year old son overdosed on some pills he got from a friend. She had no idea he had even tried them before or was struggling. But thanks to some quick action of his 11 year old sister, he is alive today. You see, his little sister knew where the emergency naloxone was kept in the camper and used it to save his life. He went on to get access to treatment and will get another chance at life. A second chance many young people will never get due to the unprecedented and unpredictable lethality of fentanyl and other fentanyl-like opioids.

Another patient, who I’ll refer to as Mary, was also able to get emergency naloxone to keep with her. She hadn’t been in recovery quite as long and had several relapses along the way. She kept it with her just in case something were to happen. She was working at her job at the gas station when a patron came in the door and told her that someone was parked in the parking lot and

looked to be passed out at the wheel. She went out to check on him and immediately recognized the signs of an overdose. She was able to administer the naloxone and save that gentleman's life as well.

Having airbags in your car doesn't make you drive more recklessly, and likewise having access to naloxone doesn't make people take bigger risks. But it does help folks survive another day. To get another chance to make a different choice tomorrow.

In regard to the decriminalization of fentanyl testing strips, this is a life-saving practice that helps people know they are safe from fentanyl poisoning. I say poisoning because that is what this is. The folks using these strips are making a concerted effort to avoid overdose and death, to use more safely until they can get the help they need to stop using altogether. Kansas should join the growing number of states who have decriminalized fentanyl testing strips because they save lives. Even in areas where possession of the strips is not prosecuted, we must decriminalize them so as to not discourage organizations from applying for grants or creating programs to make them widely available.

If I can leave you with just one message, it is this. If we keep people alive, meet them where they are, and make it easier for them to access the resources needed to get help, they get better. I see it every day. I see people recover from this terrible disease.

We need to study where Kansans are falling through the cracks and help direct resources efficiently to remedy them and save lives. These are complicated issues that every state in the union is grappling with. The Overdose Fatality Review Board will put experts in the field together to accomplish this goal.

Please support HB 2390 and give Kansans more tools the fight against the opioid epidemic.

I would be happy to make myself available for further discussion should the chair or committee members request it.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony and your support of HB2390.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anthony J. Strickland', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Anthony J. Strickland, MD, FASAM