Ohio Lawmakers Seek to Support Patients in Recovery

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Attorney General Dave Yost, county prosecutors, and law enforcement across the state of Ohio have lined up to support patients in recovery by increasing the penalty for dealing drugs near an addiction treatment facility. Tougher punishment for drug dealing near rehab centers can help with the current opioid epidemic, which is killing thousands of people in the US each year.

?Drug dealers around treatment centers are like flies on honey,? said Yost. ?This law will help protect those seeking recovery when they are their most vulnerable.?

Yost then urged senators to pass Senate Bill 55. Under Ohio?s current aggravated drug trafficking law, two factors can increase the punishment: dealing near a school or near the vicinity of a juvenile.

The bill, sponsored by Sen. Theresa Gavarone, would also include dealing within 1,000 feet of a community addiction services provider. It would raise the felony level from fourth degree to third degree in many cases.

?The idea is that a person coming out of a facility should be able to get to their car, the bus stop or possibly even walk to their home without being accosted by a drug dealer,? said Gavarone.

She said that a simple internet search yields many stories across the country of drug dealers targeting those who are trying to get better, ?The logic and economics are easy to understand.?

This bill got overwhelming House support last session. However, it died without a final Senate vote. Some think the proposal simply continues a failed war-on-drugs effort.

?The bill itself represents everything wrong about the war on drugs,? said Gary Daniels, chief lobbyist for the ACLU of Ohio. ?We can?t incarcerate our way out of this problem.?

Daniels said that a violator under the bill doesn?t have to know he is near a treatment facility to qualify for a higher penalty. He believes that it runs counter to the goal of reducing the prison population at the heart of Senate Bill 3. This legislation focuses on incarceration on drug traffickers, rather than users.

However, Sen. John Eklund, a prime sponsor of Senate Bill 3 and chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, said that he thinks increasing penalties for dealing near a treatment center is compatible with his broader sentencing overhaul.

?Where we?re going with it is to remain tough on traffickers but deal with these possession offenses,? he said. The bill would turn low-level drug possession charges into misdemeanors with incentives for treatment. ?Certainly Senate Bill 55 is an expression of staying tough on traffickers.?

Eklund stated the need for more discussion regarding whether a drug dealer should need some level of knowledge that he was operating near a rehab center before the higher penalty kicks in.

Ohio has around 2,200 drug rehab centers. The nonpartisan Legislative Service Commission says that the bill would cost the state prison system between $1.7 million and $5.7 million per year to handle offenders. Click the link to see Dallas's top rehab placement programs.

State analysts say that someone caught trafficking 10 to 20 grams of cocaine near a rehab center would face a second-degree felony under the bill, instead of third degree. On average, that means an extra 1.6 years of prison time.

Ohio Prosecuting Attorneys Association executive director Louis Tobin called it a common-sense bill because it deters drug dealers, ?while at the same time recognizing the difficulty of treatment and the importance of safe space for those seeking to recover.? He noted that the typical addicted individual relapses multiple times before they reach something that resembles recovery.

If someone in the family is struggling with opioid addiction, it is important to seek help. A combination of

medical detox and behavioral therapy can go a long way in the fight against drug abuse. But because every individual is affected by addiction differently, a comprehensive program tailored to their specific needs is necessary. Look for a nearby addiction treatment facility today and find out how drug treatment programs work.

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