



Students for Patient Advocacy Nationwide

1702 Clifton Road Suite 1650
Atlanta, GA 30322
www.spanationwide.org

July 10, 2025

The Honorable Stephen A. Huffman, Chair
The Ohio Senate Health Committee
1 Capitol Square
Columbus, OH, 43215

Position Letter: SB 137 (Require hospitals to provide overdose reversal drugs) - Support

Dear Chair Huffman and Members of the Ohio Senate Health Committee,

Students for Patient Advocacy Nationwide (SPAN) writes in strong support of Ohio SB 137, which would require hospitals to provide overdose reversal medications, including naloxone, to patients treated for opioid-related overdoses. Beyond its clear benefits for public health, SB 137 is a **necessary step to address racial inequities** in overdose mortality and access to lifesaving care in Ohio.

The state I call home continues to experience one of the highest overdose death rates in the United States. In 2023, unintentional drug overdoses claimed **more than 4,000 lives statewide** [1]. Although overall overdose deaths have slightly decreased from the previous year, the crisis disproportionately impacts certain communities. The Department of Health finds that “Black Ohioans continued to have the *highest rate of unintentional drug overdose deaths*,” [2] despite historically lower rates of opioid prescribing.

This pattern reflects a broader, national trend: D’Orsogna et al. (2023) report that in 2020, Black males in Washington D.C. experienced 134 fentanyl-related overdose deaths per 100,000, **9.4 times the rate observed in White males** [3]. These disparities are not due to biological differences, but rather, they reflect long-standing structural barriers.

Hospitals and emergency departments are critical for reducing these disparities.

Peer-reviewed research shows that providing naloxone at hospital discharge significantly reduces the risk of subsequent fatal overdoses [4]. Yet access to naloxone upon discharge remains inconsistent, particularly for patients from low-income communities and communities of color, who are more likely to face barriers such as a lack of insurance or transportation.

SB 137 establishes a uniform, equitable standard of care by ensuring that every patient treated for an opioid overdose leaves the hospital with a proven, lifesaving medication, **regardless of**



race, income, or zip code. By removing an unnecessary reliance on voluntary hospital policy, SB 137 would directly address the inequities that have left communities disproportionately vulnerable to preventable overdose deaths.

SPAN commends Senator Johnson for introducing this legislation and urges the committee to advance SB 137. This policy will save lives and move Ohio toward a more just, equitable public health system.

Thank you for your leadership and your commitment to the health of all Ohioans.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ben Kurian", written over a large, stylized capital letter "K".

Ben Kurian

Executive Director, SPAN

ben.kurian@spanationwide.org

(614) 588-5400

References

1. *Drug Overdose*, Ohio Department of Health.
<https://odh.ohio.gov/know-our-programs/violence-injury-prevention-program/drug-overdose/>
2. *2023 Ohio Unintentional Drug Overdose Report*, Ohio Department of Health.
<https://odh.ohio.gov/know-our-programs/violence-injury-prevention-program/media/2023-annual-ohio-drug-overdose-report>
3. *Fentanyl-driven acceleration of racial, gender and geographical disparities in drug overdose deaths in the United States*, D'Orsogna, M.R., Böttcher, L., & Chou.
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pgph.0000769>
4. *Naloxone Effectiveness: A Systematic Review*, National Institute of Health, PubMed.
<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30180002/>