

Connor Toth (he/him)

HB 2134 Testimony

April 21st, 2025

### TESTIMONY OF SUPPORT FOR HB 2134

I write to you today with a heavy heart, compelled to share the devastating impact of the opioid crisis on my life and community. Just a week shy of my 30th birthday, I received the crushing news that my first boyfriend, Zach, had died of an opioid overdose in his bedroom. He had recently celebrated his own 30th birthday, but his life was cut short after he lost his job as a chef due to wrist pain hindering his work. Zach had bravely navigated two years of sobriety, yet the emotional fallout of unemployment and the looming economic uncertainty in our impoverished rural hometown led to a fatal relapse.

Tragically, Zach's story is not an isolated incident. Among the 125 individuals in my high school graduating class of 2011, we have already lost 13 lives to opioid overdoses. This is the reality of the community where I grew up, but it's not unique.

Adding to this profound grief, I also lost my dear uncle a few years prior. We were all unaware of his struggles with drug use. For years, he was a dedicated truck driver, affectionately known as "Frito-Steve" by everyone along his delivery routes, including at the grocery store where I worked as a student. His journey into opioid use began with a prescription to manage chronic low back pain. While the medication initially provided relief, the insidious nature of tolerance led to a need for ever-increasing dosages. When his doctor retired, access to his prescription abruptly ended. Three weeks later, my aunt found him dead in his bathroom.

These personal tragedies underscore a critical failing in our healthcare system: the lack of accessible and affordable treatment for addiction, withdrawal, and trauma, particularly for working-class individuals and those residing in rural areas.

I want to bring to your attention 5NP, a well-established treatment protocol with a proven safety record in addressing these very issues. It is unacceptable that this potentially life-saving treatment is largely confined to those with the financial means to access fully-licensed acupuncturists, who are predominantly located in urban centers.

The lives of people like Zach and my uncle matter. Working-class families and rural communities deserve equitable access to affordable and effective care for addiction, withdrawal, and the underlying trauma that often fuels it. I urge you to consider the urgent need to expand access to treatments like 5NP, ensuring that geography and socioeconomic status are no longer barriers to recovery and a chance at life. Thank you for your time and consideration of this critical issue.