

Opinion/Forum

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Should Ohioans support the Drug Price Relief Act (State Issue 2)?

No: Plan is deceptive and unworkable

As a practicing physician, I am acutely aware that Ohioans need and deserve access to affordable prescription drugs. But in my view, Issue 2 isn't the answer. In fact, I believe it is bad public policy that would backfire, to the detriment of our state and its people.

Issue 2 proponents assert that Issue 2 would "lower drug prices" and "save taxpayers millions of dollars."

In fact, however, most experts who have studied the proposal — including a former state budget director and three former Ohio Medicaid directors who served under both Democratic and Republican governors — say passing Issue 2 would only make the problem of affordable prescription drugs even worse, by raising drug costs for a majority of Ohioans and reducing access to needed medications for some of our most vulnerable citizens.

And that is why a coalition of more than 80 trusted statewide organizations representing veterans, business, labor, and more than 30,000 Ohio doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and hospitals are urging Ohioans to vote "no" this November. The Ohio Osteopathic Association, of which I am a member, is one of nearly 30 different Ohio medical organizations opposing Issue 2, and I am doing everything I can to help sound the alarm on Issue 2.

Though proponents



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try to obscure the fact, it is important for voters to understand that Issue 2 would apply only to prescription drugs purchased by our state government. But 7 million Ohioans (nearly two out of every three of us) aren't included because we don't obtain our medications through state programs.

Two-thirds of Ohio's population — including everyone who has private insurance, employer-provided insurance, senior citizens who rely on Medicare, military veterans who get drugs through the VA, and people who have no insurance at all — are not covered by Issue 2 and, because of cost-shifting, could see their costs go up. Nor is this some nefarious plot cooked up by drug companies. Somebody always pays — and cost-shifting is basic economics.

And Issue 2 won't help taxpayers. The ballot issue would require that Ohio government pay no more for drugs than the price paid by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (the VA). But three-quarters of the drugs Ohio buys are for Medicaid recipients, and under federal law, Medicaid drugs receive a 23.1 percent discount, which is extremely close to the 24 percent

federally mandated discount enjoyed by the VA.

Moreover, Ohio currently benefits from additional discounts and rebates that our state government negotiates directly with drug manufacturers. If passing Issue 2 results in the loss of those voluntary discounts, as the Medicaid directors warn might happen, the state's drug costs could actually increase by millions of dollars per year.

Finally, Issue 2 proponents conveniently sidestep another major problem with the ballot issue: its second paragraph, which I hope all Ohioans will read for themselves.

That paragraph gives Issue 2's four sponsors — three of whom work for the California health-care CEO who is financing the campaign — an unprecedented right to intervene in any legal challenge that may be filed against the initiative if it becomes law. Even worse, it requires taxpayers to pay the sponsors' attorney fees, with no cap or limit, whether they win or lose.

Yes, Ohioans need access to affordable drugs. But Issue 2 isn't the solution because it won't help anyone: not the state, not the public, and not the taxpayers. To read more, I hope you'll go to NoOnIssue2.org. And please, get the facts before you vote this November.

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