



Senator Larry Obhof
22nd Ohio Senate District

GUEST COLUMN

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**LEGISLATURE WORKS TO PROTECT OHIOANS FROM DANGERS OF
SYNTHETIC DESIGNER DRUGS**

Earlier this year, the General Assembly took action against the growing problem of prescription drug abuse in Ohio, passing legislation that provides greater accountability for medical professionals and gives local law enforcement more tools to uncover and prosecute criminal activity. In addition, my colleagues and I also addressed another kind of drug abuse – the growing popularity of substances such as “K2,” “Spice,” and “bath salts” as a way for people to get high.

Most of you have probably heard about these drugs, many of which could be found at gas stations and corner markets. The substances commonly known as “K2” and “Spice” are generally smoked, and can mimic the highs associated with marijuana. So-called “bath salts,” which are often snorted or injected, are used by many as a substitute for methamphetamines and cocaine. Unfortunately, these synthetic compounds are even more dangerous than the drugs that they mimic. Physical symptoms for bath salts can include increased blood pressure and heart rate, chest pains, nose bleeds, and vomiting. The psychological effects are worse. Users have experienced delusions and paranoia, and, in some cases, intermittent hallucinations that can last for several days. Bath salt abuse has been linked to violence and suicide.

The use of these designer drugs has dramatically increased in the past year. The American Association of Poison Control Centers reports that poison control centers across the country have received thousands of calls about bath salts and synthetic marijuana products this year, compared with just several hundred in 2010.

This growing problem led local leaders in communities across Ohio to pursue a ban on the sale of these products. Dozens of states have also taken measures to curb bath salt abuse. Recognizing the growing danger posed by bath salts and other synthetic drugs, the General Assembly approved legislation that added several forms of synthetic marijuana and ingredients used in bath salts to the list of Schedule I controlled substances in Ohio. I am pleased to say that the bill is now effective Ohio law and retailers are no longer able to sell these dangerous substances.

However, as *The Marietta Times* reported earlier this year, “makers of these designer drugs have learned to stay one step ahead of the law.” By the time that lawmakers can move to ban the

chemical ingredients found in these drugs, the drug's producers can change its chemical formula to evade the new law.

As such, we included a provision in the bill that gives law enforcement officials the ability to deal with these attempts to evade the law. Ohio's law gives police and prosecutors the flexibility to go after "controlled substance analogs" – chemicals that are substantially similar to a banned substance, but have been altered to get around the law. In short, law enforcement officials are now better equipped to catch up with the producers of these drugs.

The abuse of both prescription and illicit drugs has a detrimental impact on our families and communities, and state and local leaders will continue our efforts to combat their abuse and ensure that addicted individuals receive the help and support they need. We will also continue to take the necessary steps to educate Ohioans about the dangers posed by synthetic designer drugs.

If you or someone you know is affected by substance abuse or addiction and needs help, you can contact Ohio's toll-free HELPLINE at 1-800-788-7254 or visit the Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services' Web site at www.odadas.ohio.gov for information about local treatment options.

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State Senator Larry Obhof represents the 22nd Ohio Senate District, which encompasses Medina, Holmes and Wayne counties and portions of Ashland County. For more information, please visit www.ohiosenate.gov/larry-obhof.