

HB 5137

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12/3/19

Mr. Chairman – Members of the Committee.

My name is Julie Risner and I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to share our son's story.

Our son, Christopher Risner, was 29 years old when he died of a Fentanyl overdose just a little over a year ago. Throughout school, he had been a record setting athlete, a good student who had a bright future ahead of him. Our family is a very typical family, possibly like your families. At the age of 16, Chris was given a Vicodin in the hallway at school. This was where his addiction began. From there he began taking 2 and then 4 and then 6 until right before he went to rehab for the first time 9 years ago when he was taking 22 Vicodin per day, just to function normally. He was no longer getting high, but taking the pills just to feel normal.

When Chris came home that day and told us he was addicted to pain pills, I thought we'll fix this, get him in to rehab and put it behind him. Little did we know that at that at age 21, it was already too late.

Eventually the prescription pain medications weren't enough and Chris turned to heroin. He attempted numerous rehabilitation centers and other forms of treatment, including 8 different depression and anxiety medications, but opioid addiction has only a 10% chance of recovery and heroin addiction only a 5% chance. Throughout all of this Chris had become the face of addiction in Jackson County for the past 5 years. He began speaking to local schools, doctors, law enforcement, prosecutors and law makers about the opioid crisis. His goal was to prevent others from becoming a victim to this horrible disease. He always said to look the other way is to give permission, we cannot afford to look the other way any longer.

Christopher had been clean from opioids for two years when his cravings got too strong, the depression and anxiety associated with addiction became too overwhelming, so he reached out to a friend who helped him contact a dealer and make a purchase of heroin. His final dose was laced with Fentanyl, just enough Fentanyl to take his life. My husband, his father, found him slumped over in his bed the day before Thanksgiving. He was already gone and had been for hours, he was so very cold. Before he went to sleep that night, he had laid out the new clothes we had just purchased for an upcoming family Disney trip, said goodnight, I love you and went to bed. Those clothes still lay there today. He did not intend this to be his last day.

I do believe strongly that this bill will buy us some time to find an effective method of treatment, of recovery for people struggling with addiction, it won't solve the opioid crisis but will allow important time to increase the success rate from the low 5 and 10%. It will take the people dealing death off the streets long enough to give those fighting for sobriety a chance to succeed. So that if they relapse, which is so often the case with this disease, it isn't their last chance. They will live another day to continue to fight this epidemic with us.

Thank you so much for holding this important hearing. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.