

Dearest Representatives,

Thank you for your service. Expressing the destruction that fentanyl has brought into my life is no easy task.

I lost one of my greatest heroes on a Wednesday.

My 13-year-old son, Luca Manuel, died from fentanyl poisoning after taking a counterfeit Percocet tablet obtained through Snapchat in August of 2020. "Luca Manuel" means "Lighthearted gift from God," and that is exactly what he was. Luca had a humanitarian heart and a true gift for service. He was well-known in our community for his outreach, which began when he held a toy and clothing drive instead of receiving gifts for his fifth birthday. Luca was convinced that everyone has the power to change the world, as long as they could persuade others that it was a good idea. At the age of ten, he convinced an entire homeless encampment to clean trash from a stream before it drained into the river in exchange for sandwiches!

Luca was a fun-loving and adventurous kid who enjoyed spending time with friends and family and making people smile. He was incredibly intelligent and analytical he was also very progressive and motivated. Luca participated in teen leadership and was a member of the debate team. While I thought he would go into politics, he wanted to be a petroleum engineer. He also enjoyed playing team sports like basketball and football, always excelling towards the end of the season. Luca played the clarinet, and his favorite composition was "Clair de Lune." He often said it was tragic that this piece only became famous after the composer's death. Luca loved going camping and fishing with friends and family or exploring new places with me. All animals adored him! While Luca's jokes weren't always funny, his laughter was contagious. He gave the best hugs and had the coolest handshakes, but above all, he was genuine and kind.

Part of me died with my son. The pain of that loss is unbearable and indescribable. At the time of Luca's death, I was a behavioral therapist, motivational speaker, and end-of-life coach, but my most important job was and still is being Luca's mom. As Luca's mom, I have become an advocate for fentanyl poisoning awareness and youth prevention advisor for Shasta County, CA. I have worked with parents and parent organizations across the country and I believe that parents have made the most significant strides in fentanyl awareness and prevention nationally. It is tireless work because our purpose and pain are intertwined; we can't clock out. Government officials constantly praise us and encourage us to keep doing what we're doing, but we need your support. We need you to internalize our stories and relate them to your own children and grandchildren. We urge you to think outside the box for any and all solutions to save America's children.