



February 18, 2025

Chairman Grassley
Ranking Member Durbin

Dear Mr. Chairman Grassley and Mr. Ranking Member Durbin:

I write as a concerned parent regarding the HALT Fentanyl Act. I would strongly request putting this bill up for vote without amendments. As the father of a child lost to Fentanyl poisoning, I believe it is imperative this legislation is passed by the Senate and sent to President Trump to sign into law as quickly as possible. We are losing many thousands of Americans every year to these dangerous illicit drugs. Law enforcement, prosecutors and judges need stronger laws in place to hold those preying on our kids accountable for their actions.

On July 16, 2021, my son, Dean "DJ" Ashenfelder, Jr., died from illicit fentanyl. He was our only child, born June 8, 1990. He was incredibly smart, had a great sense of humor and a beautiful laugh. He loved hard and was fiercely loyal to those he loved. And he suffered for many years with substance use disorder.

When DJ turned 18, he joined the US Army and was on top of the world. Never an athletic child, he thrived in the Army, loving PT and the structured life it provided. Our beautiful son found his place in the world, and we couldn't have been prouder. He was injured during training and prescribed pain medication. The injury wasn't serious, however the treatment turned out to be a very serious problem for DJ. He was addicted to opioids and the years following tested us in ways no parent wants to experience.

DJ was given a general discharge and sent home with the guilt and shame he felt. Once back in the small North Carolina town he grew up in he found it difficult to find work

and many of his friends either moved on without him or fell into a life of drugs and alcohol. DJ's addiction led to legal troubles. He went into a 2-year rehab program and did well for a few years but fell right back to drug use again and again. He spent several years in one program and another but was unable to control his addiction.

For better than 13 years, we prayed for him, we begged him, we fought with him, and we made tough decisions that separated us from our son. In 2021, after he'd spent 6 months in county jail awaiting trial, we allowed him to come home. He wanted to be home to help care for me, I'd suffered a heart attack in May and he was desperate to be home. We hoped it would be different this time, but it wasn't to be.

On July 16, 2021, my life was forever changed. I was away from home for work when my wife called to tell me she just found our son dead in his bedroom. I was hours away and completely helpless. I have no one to carry on my name, no one to help me as I grow older. We will never know the joy of seeing our son get married and never will we hold a grandbaby. That's what the fentanyl crisis has left so many families across the country.

For months we worked with our Sheriff's Department as they built a case against the person who sold our son the poison that killed him. In the end, the DA refused to take the case to trial. Without the HALT Fentanyl Act, far too many drug dealers will go free.

In honor and memory of our child, we started a non-profit organization, DJ's Wish – Freedom From Fentanyl. Our mission is to raise awareness and give other families hope that their sons and daughters will be safe from illicit drugs. Passing this legislation will help to keep our kids safe.

Your sincere consideration of our requests and the others we know you have received is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely yours,

Dean Ashenfelder
DJ's Wish

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