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To whom it may concern:

My beautiful son, Jared, would take his last breath on February 17, 2020. After battling the disease of addiction for ten years, a chance for continued active recovery was taken from him on short notice. Illicit fentanyl ensured that my son would not be given another chance at life. Jared did not know that he had; ingested illicit fentanyl; he died quickly, alone, on his kitchen floor. At 8:13 pm on February 17, 2020, I was notified that my son lost his life. My life was forever changed. At that time, I knew little, if anything, about illicit fentanyl. And, yet, now this word - fentanyl - is on my lips each and every day.

Jared was such a wonderful, bright soul who brought love, friendship, compassion and humor into the lives of others. He cared deeply about his family and friends and was always quick to lend a smile and deep conversation. He was passionate about travel and curious about other cultures. He had a knack for bringing people from all walks of life together. A few of his favorite things included the Carolina Panthers, the Florida Gators, FC Bayern Munich, Fantasy Football and, always, his English Bulldog, Tennyson. Life came easily for Jared until 2010, which is the year he began his struggle with addiction.

In the summer of 2010, Jared had his wisdom teeth extracted. I clearly recall thinking nothing about taking him to an oral surgeon for this procedure. My biggest concern was his inability to eat and the discomfort he might suffer. I never considered that the Percocet Jared received was overprescribed and highly addictive. My son changed in so many ways that summer and, yet, I wouldn't learn of his addiction to Oxycodone until December 2010. He put his arm around my shoulder during a counseling session and said, "Mom, I'm struggling with addiction and I'm scared." Thus, the next four years consisted of counseling, IOP's, treatment programs and sober living facilities. The journey was long, hard and so very painful. In 2014, upon losing his roommate to an overdose, Jared understood that he was fallible — that he, too, could lose his life. After many heart-wrenching conversations, Jared was sent to an inpatient facility in Tennessee for three months, and he thrived. Jared returned to North Carolina loving life again. My son was back. After working his recovery program, he took a job with Coca-Cola Bottling in Charlotte. Jared had found his way through the darkness — he had found his way home.

Jared worked at Coca-Cola from 2015 until February 17, 2020. I spoke to Jared, for the last time, on February 16, 2020. He was exhausted from working twelve-hour shifts and suffered from some other major life stressors. Jared had landed in the middle of his

own perfect storm, as we all do in life at some point in time. “Mom, I need to see a doctor,” he’d mentioned. I could hear the struggle in his voice. We agreed to meet in Davidson, North Carolina that week, as we had so many times before. Davidson had become an easy place to meet for dinner, and we had a favorite restaurant. We loved to walk around the little college town to talk and spend time together. So, having made our plan, we said goodnight, just assuming we’d see one another on February 19. But that meeting was not to be. Jared thought he was going to work on February 17. He had on his backpack and was dressed to leave. He called a friend, briefly, to say that he was struggling and that he’d taken something. Roughly three words slipped from Jared’s mouth and then he died, alone.

On February 19, 2020, I didn’t meet Jared for lunch in Davidson, North Carolina. We didn’t have the opportunity to discuss his options — options like cutting back on his workload, seeing a physician and finding ways to manage his stress. Illicit fentanyl robbed my son of his humanity, his dignity, his future. Jared was returned to Forsyth County on February 19 to a funeral home, where I patiently waited to see him again - to be with him - and to tell him so many things for the very last time. We didn’t have lunch that day - I planned his service instead. He was swaddled like a small child because that’s what happens after an autopsy. No words exist to describe this loss.

Someone I loved so dearly was so quickly ripped from this earth, and this scenario has been playing out throughout our communities. The third wave of the opioid epidemic — the fentanyl epidemic — was upon us. So many challenges would arise over the first couple of years after Jared’s death. We moved straight into the Covid epidemic after his burial, a death by distribution investigation, a long wait for autopsy and toxicology reports. For me, most of all, I just wanted to know what my son ingested and who hurt him. The answer to all these questions would come to pass and, yet, I was only left with “Why?” How does this happen and why?

The answer is both simple and complex. Illicit fentanyl is a poison. What happened to Jared was also happening to so many others. My desire to raise awareness about illicit fentanyl was actuated by Jared’s death. I tell Jared’s story to save the lives of others. Jared was thirty-one when his life was so quickly cut short. He deserves a voice.

Respectfully,

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