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Letter to Congress

Julie Knight [REDACTED]@gmail.com>

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To: [REDACTED]@voicesforawareness.com" [REDACTED]@voicesforawareness.com>

Hi Andrea,

Submitting my letter for Congress. Including the text below because I have had problems in the past with people not being able to open an Apple document.

Dear Members of Congress,

I appreciate you taking the time to read my daughter Jessica's story. Jessica was raised in an upper middle class family in Elbert County, Colorado, just outside the metro Denver area. By all accounts, Jessica was raised in a home that most people would consider ideal. We chose to move to Elbert County when Jessica was 3 years old with the hope of bringing our kids up in a more rural area with a better quality of life than living in an urban area. Jessica, like her brother, was involved in sports, 4-H, and scouting programs. When Jessica hit middle school, things began to change. By 8th grade, she had started getting into trouble at school, and her grades began to slide. We were assured by school staff and counselors that this was normal behavior for some kids, and that she would likely not outgrow this phase until she was well in to high school. After a failed freshman year, we moved her to the local alternative high school. There were only about 50 students, and they had a focus on credit recovery and working with kids that did not fit the traditional setting. During her sophomore year, she began calling from school almost daily, saying she could not feel her arms, legs, head, etc. and needed to be picked up. I immediately took her to see her family doctor. From there, she was screened for many possible issues and no one could find anything medically wrong. She finally texted me one night saying she needed to talk to someone because she was feeling very depressed and suicidal. I was able to secure an appointment with behavioral health within a week, and she was diagnosed with major depressive disorder, anxiety, and panic disorder. At this time she began treatment with a psychiatrist and counselor. Within about 4 months, she again said she was suicidal and was placed on a 72 hour mental health hold at a youth facility. During this stay, we were informed she had tested positive for opiates. She was 16 years old. This kicked off a very long six year battle with addiction. We attended an endless number of education and counseling sessions. She was referred to intensive outpatient treatment. She continued to get worse. By the time she was 18, she was referred for methadone treatment. This involved an 80 mile round trip drive daily to dose at the nearest clinic. They increased her dose to the point we didn't trust her to be able to make the drive safely on her own. By this time, she was also in the criminal justice system, as we made it clear we would call the police any time we found drugs. Despite having been detained in the juvenile facility and being on probation, she continued to get into trouble because of her addiction and overwhelming need for opiates. After walking out of 2 court ordered treatment programs, she was sentenced to 6 months in jail. The judge said he had never seen anyone so young with such a severe addiction problem. A day after being released from jail I found her overdosed on heroin, administered Narcan, and call 911. She was returned to jail. She spent 3 more months in jail, while they tried to figure out what to do. She was finally accepted to Recovery Court (required pleading guilty to felony possession) and released to sober living. With 2 weeks, she failed a drug screen and was supposed to go to a detox center. She was turned away because they were full, and the backup would not allow methadone dosing. She was sent to our house until things could be sorted out. I went to wake her the next morning, and found her dead on her bed. She had been gone for several hours. The autopsy showed she had over 10x the lethal amount of fentanyl in her system, and said she died within minutes of ingesting it. Unless you have witnessed a loved one battle addiction and then lost them, you can not imagine the heartbreak and devastation. I felt we were fighting the impossible trying to find treatment for her that would not bankrupt us, despite having good health care coverage. We were told we could pay outside of insurance, which would likely be about \$30,000. We were paying for our son to attend college at this time, and did it have the money to fund something like that. We are now left to live the rest of our lives without our daughter, and our sons without their sister. Fentanyl had flooded the market during her time in jail, and it's what the dealers pushed out to her - pure fentanyl powder. I now work to support local foundations working in the recovery field, and have joined forces with several groups advocating for change. Action needs to be taken against the cartels and the Chinese who supply the precursors to make fentanyl. We cannot sit idly as a generation is poisoned. I miss my daughter every single day. Her smile, her laugh, her quick wit and sense of humor.

Sincerely, Julie Knight