

TO: Chairman Grassley and Ranking Member Durbin:

This is my son Mason. story and why we need to pass the HALT Fentanyl Act. Along with my son so many are losing their lives each day.

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>> I was 33 weeks pregnant when Mason decided to make his arrival in the world. He was born 7/08/2004 in Jackson, MS. From the time he was born there was something about him that everyone loved. Growing up Mason was as ways the silly/goofy that had to keep everyone entertained by making them laugh. In school he always struggled but did it with a smile on his face. From the time he was born he had several health issues but that never stopped him. From the time he was 10 yr. Old he knew what he wanted to do whenever he grew up, that was join the marines and become a ranger. As Mason got older he worked even harder to make sure he got in the marines, while at Germantown he joined JROTC/ROTC as soon as he was old enough, he loved everything about it and made him even more set to become a Ranger. When Covid hit he had a hard time adjusting to being home-doing school work without the extra help from teachers etc. then school opened back up but his Dr. did not want him around everyone due to some of his health issues so he started the following school year at home which he hated because that meant no ROTC. In 2021 Mason started his Junior Year and of course I started noticing changes in him but age/his parents divorcing/etc. I knew he had a lot going on but he was still adamant about what he was doing when he graduated. In 2022 Mason started skipping school here and there and he wasn't the kid I knew but I thought it was life getting him down. We worked through it and got him back on track or so I thought. Mason was going to school and working at a pizza place then an oil changing place because he decided he still wanted to join the marines but instead of a ranger he wanted to be a diesel mechanic, I also worked 2 jobs so we saw each other in passing most days but when I did see him he always looked tired which him being hypoglycemic and having blood issues it happened if he was worn out. Not long before Masons 18th birthday he started dating a girl and I noticed him changing not in a good way, his group of friends was also changing. I got a call one night that I needed to pick him up from Madison airport because him and his girlfriend got pulled over and they had marijuana on them. When I arrived and spoke with police I asked them to take him because we weren't starting this route in life and he needed to be held accountable now before something bad happened later in life but they said because he wasn't 18 and Juvi was full they had to release him to me. I had already been down this road with my older son and Mason was so adamant he was not going to do anything like that. After that night I kept a closer eye on him and not much changed in a bad way until Labor Day wknd. 2022. that's when our worlds started crashing down. I was home on the couch and Mason/T [REDACTED] were there also. He stood in the livingroom talking to me looking so tired/black under his eyes etc. he said he was sore/exhausted from work. 8 minutes after he walked to his room T [REDACTED] (his GF) came running out of his room saying "help me he is overdosing" as I ran to his room calling 911 I kept asking her what he took she said he got a Percocet because his back hurt from working. (Working in dental for 20 yr. I knew you dont OD on a pain pill) when I got to his room there was my kid-laying on his back turning blue/shallow breathing/barely a pulse. I immediately picked him up and laid him on the floor so I could start CPR. I did CPR/sternum rubs, I remember screaming-repeating to him to wake up/do not die on me/please just wake up as I was doing those T [REDACTED] handed me Narcan, she said she had given him one before she came to get me but it didn't work. Along with CPR/sternum rubs we gave him 2 Narcan before EMS arrived, I heard a gasp of air and his eyes opened along with his blue lips starting to get something color to them. I sat him up and he had a glazed over stare that felt like he was looking through me then he was gasping more. When he came to he asked me why I was hollering at T [REDACTED] because all they did was lay down for a nap and I woke him up screaming at her. I kept saying you almost died Mason what did you take then EMS was coming through the door. When they arrived he went in the bathroom to throw up while officers were searching his room and asking questions. Between EMS/cops/etc. asking 100 questions it finally hit me-my kid was doing something that could kill him and how/why did they carry Narcan around. They took him to the ER in the ambulance and I followed behind. Before they left my house one of the EMTs came up to me and told me they hate to say it but if this happened again when I call 911 don't say he is overdosing-Sat he is unresponsive because they had been getting so many overdose calls they are getting

numb to what they see when they arrive and most that survive will use again. When I got there I knew he could deny me coming in the room because he had turned 18 in July. He let me come in and as we were talking/crying I kept asking what he was on and did he know he almost died, he was still telling me nothing was wrong and I woke him up from a nap. That's when the ER staff told me it was FENTANYL. Fentanyl-how did my kid get ahold of that, it's given through IV in a hospital. The next day was well reality sank in that I almost lost my son in my arms-I remembered that I had a security camera in my livingroom so I recorded the video of the night before and sent it to both of them so he could see/hear what happened the night before, he kept asking why was I hollering at T█-it's because his dog ran in the room with me and when I got him to the floor she got on his legs and wouldn't get off him, I was telling to get the dog out of the room and she didn't need to see it either. After sending him the videos and us talking that day (he said he thought he got Percocet for his back) I thought ok this is a wake up call for him to get it together because he almost died last night and surely this will scare him to not try anything again. He explained that people were putting Fentanyl in pills and selling them etc. He did good for a minute, and I thought ok my kid is back and that scared him enough said he still had the same goals for the following June to join the Marines but he was falling so far behind in school (he would go and choose to not do his work etc.) we knew he would fail his senior yr. If he didn't put the work in. from then until he passed it was a downward spiral as I will explain, it was almost like he didn't care what happened in life. A couple days after he overdosed at the house we were talking and he was telling me that T█ had Narcanned him 2 days prior to the night I did but he made her promise to not tell me and yes it started out with he getting a pain pill or so he thought but then at some point he knew it had fentanyl in it and all of his friends carry Narcan because of Fentanyl. He also explained the reason he always ate sugary food was because he would withdraw and along with feeling like he had the flu the sugar helped. Then it clicked, the mop bucket he always had in his room, eating a certain type of food, he attitude, falling asleep mid sentence, etc. it all made sense-my kid the one that was so against drugs was on them and as a mom it was my job to protect him from that but how-I couldn't protect my kid from himself. He said he would try to stop using it but he would be so sick getting more was the only thing that made him feel better and that was the vicious cycle of fentanyl. He did really good for awhile then I saw the changes again and I knew-the lies/stealing from me etc. but he would always fight with me and tell me he was sober me he could prove it with drug tests so I bought them and they only showed marijuana. In early Dec. 2022 after he wrecked his vehicle in the yard/put a hole in his bedroom wall I had enough and told him to get out if he couldn't respect me/our house/our things/etc, I couldn't handle the fighting and disrespect. every time my phone rang and it was him I knew some lie was coming out of his mouth and that is not the kid I raised. Him and T█ went to her moms house (never spoke to/nor met her mom). They stayed there for a couple weeks and Mason begged to come home because of how awful it was at her mom's/how bad her mom was and I already knew T█ had a hard life with her mom so I told them they could come back to the house under certain conditions, and they both agreed to them, About three weeks after they came back to the house T█'s mom sent me a message and wanted to meet me so my then boyfriend/now hisband went to meet her. By this time I found out she was the one that gave Mason and T█ fentanyl for the first time And she was one of the main people that was feeding it to them. When we met her, She told me that she had a video to show me from three weeks prior when they were at her house, but to forewarn me she did not call anybody when she took the video because she did not want the cops nor ambulance at her house. I recorded the video with my phone and it was Mason being so high he had a loaded shotgun to his face and had no idea, his hand slipped, and the shotgun went in his mouth as she kept recording while her daughter was high standing in the closet. Luckily the gun did not go off. After seeing the video, I spoke my piece to her and we left. The next day I went to the courthouse to do a court order rehab before Mason hurt himself or somebody else and the judge granted it, but it would be early February before they could get him into rehab. For the next three weeks, my house was nothing but chaos but I knew there was an end in sight because what judge wouldn't make a kid on Fentanyl go to rehab.-the day before court I went to Mason's room and he was slumped over holding a cookie and I asked him what he was doing. He semi woke up and told me he was having a snack, but he was passing out holding the cookie and had no idea and I thought this is it my kid is going to die before he gets in a rehab. I then recorded him to show the

judge what was happening at my house. I knew they were going to send him to a region eight facility if the judge said go but I wanted him to go to a local private facility which I knew was very expensive but was ready to pay for because they had medical detox, etc. and I knew or thought I knew he would be well taken care of and as long as my son was alive and sober that's all that mattered. the day of court, which meanwhile T █████ Mom went around what I said because I did not want them at the same rehab. She got a voucher for her daughter to go to the same rehab as Mason. The day of court I went in with Mason and the judge granted for him to go to this private facility for 90 days and sober living for eight months and apparently when T █████ went in, they granted her the same which I was surprised because T █████'s mom told the judge that she recorded the video of Mason that day because she thought Mason was going to kill them (made no sense). The judge allowed me to drive them straight to the rehab facility instead of the sheriff so I did. The judge stated part of the court order was Mason could not leave for any reason, unless it was with me, sheriff, another rehab facility until he completed all of the things in the court order or he would go to jail for violating the order. The rehab facility accepted what the order stated as far as legal obligations. when we got to rehab Mason granted me to have rights to all of his records while he was in there and I'm so thankful for that. When we got to the rehab facility I was assured Mason/T █████ would not come in contact with each other while they were in there but that was a lie. After 10 days of medical detox, Mason joined everyone in rehab, which included T █████. Through the span of being in that rehab they were all allowed to have their phones 24/7 and I stated to all of them that worked at the facility aIt was not a good idea because Mason was local so are his dealers and it's not a good idea for him to have his phone and they also stated several times that he is very high risk for relapse. This rehab allows people to have different passes from the facility depending on how long You are there etc. Mason was there for about 40 days and he got granted a 4 hour pass so I did the paperwork for my mom to go pick him up, my mom/husband because we got married after Mason went to rehab/myself went to have lunch and my mom took him to get a couple sweatshirts at the mall before he had to be back. He told me that day when he got done with sober living, etc. he no longer wanted to be a marine, he wanted to be a counselor in a rehab Specifically for fentanyl because he knows what it does to your body/family/friends, etc. The following week rehab granted him and T █████ a 24 hour pass, but I denied Mason so T █████ took hers and when she came back to rehab, she brought fentanyl in with her. Mason along with four others got high Saturday night, but one of the kids overdosed and the people that work there found out so all of them got kicked out. That Sunday morning, I spoke with the facility because they called to tell me Mason used the night before and because of Mason's court order he had to be transferred to another facility, which was going to pick him up and they had everything lined up. While the other facility was coming to get him another person that worked there let Mason leave with all of the others that got high and got kicked out. From Sunday to Tuesday I did welfare checks at T █████'s mom's house and several other places where I thought he might be because I could not find him, T █████'s mom told the police every day he was not there which he was. Tuesday afternoon Mason left T █████'s house and apparently went to a house five minutes from mine. He finally called me that night (he would not disclose his location/who he was with/etc) and said he was going to the new rehab the next morning that he had a ride, etc. after us arguing back-and-forth, we both finally calmed down and the last thing I told him was that I love him, but if he did not get to rehab, the next phone call that I would get would be that he's gone and he promised me he was sober because he knows his tolerance is low and learned his lesson when he did it in rehab. He said he promised he was going there next morning but would not let me take him. The next morning 3/29/2023 I did welfare checks again but around 11AM when the police called me back along with T █████, I remember her crying and telling me that they found Mason but she wasn't with him because he fought with her the night before and left with one of the girls He got high with in rehab and she did not know where he was Tuesday night. the police kept telling me " we have a body where do we take the body? We have to take the body somewhere so where are we taking the body" All I kept saying was to revive him it will work I have done it before just revive him. All I heard was "we can't he is already gone so where do we take the body" the scream that came out of my mouth they say you will never forget-still replays over and over. I don't remember much from that point until my husband and I pulled in the funeral home and as we were walking into the funeral home I saw them pulling in with Mason. The next couple weeks were

a blur for the most part but I do remember the rehab facility calling me the day after he passed to tell me they were sorry to hear about Mason and I told them it was their fault between putting them together/allowing phones-passes/not checking T [REDACTED] when she came back and then to break their agreement with the court system letting him leave with the other kids that got kicked out. After he passed I found out where he was etc. the girl that picked him up Tuesday night took him to her sugar daddy house where the dealer came to them for Mason to get one last high before he went to the new rehab (his choice was jail or rehab because he broke the court order). They say Mason and the girl got high around 11 and Mason went to bed and they found him around 11 the next morning and called 911. That is far from what actually happened-they knew he passed but didn't want to call 911 because they didn't want the cops there, took some of his jewelry, moved him to another room, and sent pictures of him across Snapchat then called the cops hours later. After he passed his fellow classmates asked me to attend their graduation and sit in Mason's seat because they had something to present to me (didn't know what it was until I received it) but I couldn't do it, it was so fresh he was supposed to be on that stage-they did a fundraiser for Mason to purchase his graduation stuff and flowers for me which were given to me the week after graduation. My husband and I did a fentanyl awareness ride on Mason's birthday which we had a turnout of around 200 people, I had shirts made with his name and talking about Fentanyl awareness on the back that I wear quite often and have had people come up to me and ask about Mason/tell me their story of someone they lost. Since Mason's passing I have learned so much about Fentanyl and I want to be one that if I can help one family from having to live this life I have done what Mason wanted to do. When I say I lost my son I get "the look" when I say how he passed away well it's just another kid that chose to do drugs and knew what the outcome could be and that is not the case at all, he was a son, brother, grandson, cousin, friend to so many. In my opinion it's the dealers that are killing our kids because they are the ones supplying the drugs knowing what they are doing to these kids and at the end of the day they lay their heads down with their pockets full and if the system arrests them it's a slap on the hand. They are the ones that resulted in my son and so many others' death. The system doesn't seem to want to help these kids with awareness and making facilities accessible for them to get help without the stigma of "another kid on drugs" which isn't fair to the ones that need help. I have to sit each day and look at my son's ashes along with a few other things on a shelf. They say the 1st year is hard but for me I disagree-the 1st year is a numb blur with nightmares of the day he passed and the days that followed playing on repeat. It's the 2nd yr. That is even harder because you know it's real and have to face the emotions. The nightmares have gotten better on the rare occasion I am able to sleep. I think about him 24/7 with everything I say and do. and how he is missing so much because he had his whole life ahead of him as well as so many others. Now all we have are the memories. They say grief is just love with nowhere to go and it never gets easier but you learn how to cope with it, that is true until out of the blue a random thought/smell/etc. hits out of nowhere and it takes you right back to the day they passed away. I have days I am so mad at Mason for his choices and not being here but then I also have to remember he was suffering just as much if not more than me wanting him to get sober-would I want him here having that struggle the rest of his life or know he is at peace and I will see him again one day.

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Renee Clements