

Dear New Members of Congress,

I want to share a piece of my beloved son Matthew's story with the hope that you'll have the heart to change new laws and policies to help save our future generations.

My precious son was born on February 18th, 1999 in Abilene, TX. I was a teen mom when I decided to take on the challenge of raising him with the loving support of our family. Growing up he was such a loving, charismatic and smart little boy. He could identify and pronounce every dinosaur in books he often had me read to him. He was often quiet and kept to himself but also loved the company of being around family during celebrations. Often times I would skip my college classes to attend field trip outings with him during school. Those are some of our best memories together. We were inseparable. He was my focus besides being determined to finish nursing school so I could provide us with a better future. I worked tirelessly to be the best mother and nursing student.

Beginning his kindergarten year, I was approached by his teacher for concerns about his inability to focus in class and was encouraged to get an ADHD evaluation. Throughout his childhood, he was prescribed ADHD, antianxiety, bipolar, and antidepressants under the supervision of his pediatrician, psychiatrist, and counselor for ADHD, opposition defiant disorder, anxiety, depression, questionable bipolar disorder and suicidal ideation. Our little family had a difficult time adjusting to our new life with the addition of his little sister Isabella. We felt the need for individual and family counseling, so we did our best to provide the help we needed as a family unit. I later regretted the decision to put him on meds and had to work many years to forgive myself for allowing my son to take these toxic drugs. I feel they only inhibited him and led to permanent brain chemical damage that contributed to his addiction as a teenager.

Fast forward to his teenage years when I first started to suspect he was smoking cannabis and possibly taking pills that were given to him by friends right before we moved to Weatherford, TX. He started skipping school due to him feeling like he was being targeted and bullied by other classmates. That also was the case while in elementary school. He often said, "I'm different mom. I'm weird." He was a creative kid and liked to be his own trendsetter for how he dressed and conducted himself. He later embraced his authenticity into young adulthood and was his unapologetic self as he would say. Skipping school led to fights between me and my husband so we felt the need to change his environment with hopes that he would improve. So, we decided for him to move back to Abilene to live with his biological father.

Things continued to spiral as he kept hanging around other kids who were using street drugs. He often would use while performing rock concerts with his fellow bandmates which led to his addiction to opioids. Being in this kind of fast “rock and roll” lifestyle led to him being in trouble with the law. Because of his inability to stay clean, he failed several drug tests that prompted court orders for him to seek drug treatment. His first attempt was with a church-affiliated men's home that worked with individuals with addiction. He graduated and was on the right track until life situations became unbearable and he would spiral again. It became a vicious cycle for him to control. The lack of suitable options for him was limited due to the lack of funding and resources in our community for sobriety treatment. So, he was court-ordered to be sent to SAFFP (substance abuse facility prison). I feel this was a joke of a treatment facility that he went to twice, once at the Bradshaw Henderson Unit in Henderson, TX during the peak of COVID and the second time at the Stringfellow Unit in Rosharon, TX. He was sent to the Clover House in Odessa, TX for transition after being released from the Stringfellow Unit March of 2024. There was also a lack of treatment and resources that could have been better managed. I feel it was a joke of a rehab centers given the lack of staff members to even conduct necessary group and individual counseling sessions.

Our healthcare and judicial systems have failed so many young individuals who should have been given a better opportunity to help themselves. My son's latest release was from the Clover House in May 2024. He was optimistic and worked hard to rehab himself with the psychology and self-help books he requested I send him. His work showed in the precious words of healing he left in his journals. He was getting better and had goals and aspirations. When he was discharged from Stringfellow Unit, they abruptly discontinued his antidepressants which I feel was also a contributing factor for him going back into active addiction. He was found dead in his bed by his grandmother who attempted CPR but was too late on July 14th, 2024. The autopsy report showed fentanyl toxicity. Our precious son's life was cut short due to the chemical warfare at hand. The person who sold it to him took advantage of his weak moment and sold it to him 5 times more than what fentanyl pills are normally sold for on the street. His case is still being investigated and I pray that person is held accountable. He was getting ready to start electrician school and travel the world after starting his own electrician business. We were looking forward to him joining us here in Colorado. I promised him I would get us out of Abilene because I felt it would be good for him to get away from the crowd that kept pulling him into active addiction. He never made it and we will never be the same. We are all so heartbroken including his younger sisters and brother who he had plans to rekindle their relationship. There is no pain greater than losing a child and I beg you all to make the necessary changes to stop this chemical warfare that's been targeted on a young, beautiful generation who can bring

about a true awakening in our communities. How many is too many? Every life is precious and together with fellow angel parents, we ask you to make the necessary changes before it's too late.

With Love,

Matt's mom, April Barron