

To the Members of the Senate Committee,

My name is Andrea Silvano and I reside in Norwood Massachusetts. I am writing this letter to you as a grieving mother who lost her youngest son to Fentanyl poisoning. My son, Zachary Acome Parsons, now forever 21, passed away on April 9th, 2019 and we, with very heavy hearts, laid him to rest on April 17, 2019 which ironically would have been his 22nd birthday. There are no words to express the devastation that we felt.

Zach's death certificate read that his cause of death was due to a "Drug Overdose". I can say to you with complete certainty that this was NOT an overdose, Zachary was murdered. A drug dealer had sold him two counterfeit Percocet pills through Snapchat and those pills were determined to be pure fentanyl. Not only were they pure fentanyl, but we learned that the amount of fentanyl was enough to kill an entire room full of grown men!

The night before Zach died, we all worked out as a family, had pizza and talked about plans for the following morning. Around 9pm that evening I went up to bed, Zach came into my room shortly after and kissed me on the cheek, gave me a hug, and said, "love you Mama, see you in the morning." He then told me that he was going to take a shower and go to bed. Little did I know that this was going to be the last time I would ever see my child alive again.

Zachary ingested 1/4 of the pill that he believed to be Percocet before he was about to get into the shower. He never made it into the shower. Instead, he died alone on the bathroom floor. We had no idea until we found him early the next morning. My fiancé, Bobby, woke me before 6 am and said that Zach wasn't answering him when he was knocking on the bathroom door and that the shower was running. Bobby also heard Dave Matthews' band music (Zach's favorite) blaring from Zach's phone. Bobby started pounding on the door and I jumped out of bed and screamed as I ran towards the bathroom door because I just knew something was really wrong.

Bobby, kicked in the bathroom door and there we saw my son curled up on the floor, stuck between the bathroom vanity and the toilet. I screamed for him to call 911, and I was told to start CPR. I kept screaming because somehow, we just couldn't move him enough to get him on his back to be able to administer CPR. The next few seconds I kept thinking he's gone, he's blue, he's cold, I quickly pushed those thoughts away, covered him with my bathrobe to warm him up and begged him to wake up and come back to me... I just held him in my arms.

Bobby had run downstairs and outside because the ambulance couldn't find our long driveway. I was alone with my boy and I kept trying to move him. There was blood beneath him as he must have hit his head when he fell... I screamed to Zach, "please breathe" as I tried to give him CPR. The police and firemen got there and tried to peel me off of him, I was frantic and begged them to do something! I screamed at them, "where are the paramedic? Why are they taking so long?!!" I would not leave his side – this was my son, my baby! They had to force me to go downstairs so they could try to

help him. These were the last memories of my son. The rest of the day was a blur. The police came down to tell me that they had found two pills and that Zach had apparently taken part of one of the pills. They said that the pills were discolored and the print was off and that they would get in touch with me again very soon.

I then was asked to hand over Zach's phone to the police and then to the Drug Enforcement Agency to see what they could find out. I was told that his phone was "clean" and that there were no numbers or texts from dealers. What they did find, however, was that his last exchange was on Snapchat and it was to a dealer with Zach asking, "Are you sure these are real?!" At this point I was devastated to be told that there was not much more that could be done because Snapchat was not a company that would comply with these findings and help to stop this dealer. They informed me that "they needed the big guy!" Apparently, only selling two pills that kills someone's child was not big enough!

All of this information left me totally confused. I was still in shock, and really knew nothing about Snapchat and sadly even less about fentanyl. I still to this day have the emoji picture of this drug dealer, who has obviously moved on to a different name on Snapchat and is most likely still walking the streets selling these lethal counterfeit pills.

Everything about this was more than I could bear and I went into a deep state of depression. No one can begin to understand the grief of losing a child. After the urgency of everything calms down you are then left alone with your thoughts and your grief. You are alone and are somehow blaming yourself for the loss of your own child. My life has been changed forever. Never did I think that I would have to say goodbye to my child at a funeral home, in a cold room, with a sheet covering his body. There is now such an emptiness in my heart that I will carry until the day I die, until the day I finally get to join my angel in heaven.

I have struggled, to the point that I thought I needed to commit myself. I know that this was a selfish thought, but I am sure that most of us that have lost children have felt this same urge. The grief is just horrific and overwhelming and you cannot escape it. In your head all you can think is that it is just not supposed to happen, you are not supposed to bury your child! You are not supposed to say goodbye this way!

I used to go into the bathroom and lie on the floor where I had found Zach, and I would cry for hours on end. Bobby would come home and pick me up off of the floor. I am still not sure how or why I found my way to the place where he died, but this was how I was living. When my three other children would come to visit, I learned to put on a brave face and pretend that I was okay until they would leave and I then I would quietly crumble again trying to find answers.

Recently with PTSD therapy and the help of the "parents' network" I have begun on a journey of healing, and allowing myself some grace. I am so grateful for the community and all of the support from many of the other parents. I am especially grateful to my fiancé Bobby whom Zach considered a second father. Recently this February I got the

courage to go to Washington DC and attend the Congressional Hearing. I hope to keep moving forward, one step at a time. I have to keep moving forward- both for myself and for my son's memory.

My son Zachary had his whole life ahead of him. He worked as a paramedic, and had just started a new construction job. Enlisting in the Navy was also something he was contemplating and was able to speak to a recruiter before he had passed. We will never know now as his life was so needlessly cut short.

Anyone who knew Zach would tell you the same thing- that he was one of the sweetest humans, always eager and willing to help others in need. Honestly, he would take the shirt off of his back for anyone. Standing at 6'4", he was 200 pounds of muscle and tattoos, but beneath all of that, he was a gentle giant that had the sweetest soul and the purest heart. He loved his crazy workouts, playing football, he adored his dogs and he really looked up to his older siblings who loved him dearly.

When he was little he went to a Montessori School and learned how to write script and play the guitar- he thrived in a smaller classroom. His teachers all loved him and so did his classmates. Zach was always a jokester but with his big puppy eyes, who could ever stay upset with him? He was just an all around good kid- it is as simple as that. He had a huge beautiful smile, and a contagious laugh that could always find a way to brighten anyone's day!

Zachary left behind his three siblings, CJ, Joseph and Alexis, who each in their own way have all understandably struggled with some sort of anxiety and depression since the loss of their brother. Being the older siblings, they all have said to me at some point or another that they should have done more. This obviously breaks my heart as there was nothing they could have done, no one saw this coming! There is not a day that goes by that Zach is not on my mind and in my heart. I never thought when I went to visit my son, that it would be visiting him at the Newton Cemetery. But this unfairly is my new normal...

This scenario could and has happened to many families. Fentanyl does not discriminate and sadly no family is immune to this danger! We NEED to do better so other families never have to go through the heartbreak of losing a child or loved one. We NEED to secure our borders and STOP the Cartels from murdering our Children by Chinese fentanyl and any other means that this and other lethal drugs get here!

We NEED to have stricter enforcement against dealers- even when it is just one pill that takes a life. Think about it, what did that dealer profit from selling my son those two pills? Maybe \$40? Is that seriously all that my son's life was worth? I was told that they could not catch this particular dealer because Snapchat was involved! No parent should ever have to hear these words and feel so helpless when facing this kind of loss and grief! I know that I have to try to make things change- it is not an option for me and for so many others that have suffered loss at the hands of the lack of regulation with these social media giants. We NEED to hold all of these Social Media companies

accountable- NO EXCEPTIONS. At the Judiciary Hearing, we listened to Senators from both sides of the aisle who were in agreement that until we hit Big Tech companies in their pockets, they will continue profiting off of our children and nothing will change. The next loss could be yours- are you willing to take that chance? The reality is that sadly fentanyl changes our past, present and our future. There is an URGENT NEED to confront this evil that has entered our country. I pray for change. I pray that no other families have to go through the hell of losing a child to this poison. Thank you for listening to my story.

Sincerely,

Andrea Jo Silvano

Zachary's Mother