

**Testimony for House Resolution 590 – Difficulties with Access to Drug and Alcohol Treatment**

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**TRAGEDY VS. TREATMENT**

***I drove like a wild man to get to the hospital, after I received a phone call from my ex-wife that my son, 25 years old, had over-dosed and she didn't know what the status was at that moment on March 18, 1998 at 5:30 am. And that I better get there quick.***

***While engaged in the mechanics of driving with little or no concentration, I don't think I stopped at any red lights or stop signs, coupled with a river of tears pouring down my cheeks, screaming at the top of my lungs, "THIS CAN'T HAPPEN!!! PLEASE GOD NOOO!!!" My foot was on the gas mostly full throttle, swerving and navigating mindlessly through traffic and on the highway. My mind went to a bad neighborhood with relentless repetition, thinking only the worst, hoping that I would walk in and it was just a mistake, just a slight overdose, maybe it wasn't him, maybe someone was wrong maybe, maybe, maybe....I painfully thought...; but then again, is there really a "slight" overdose, I asked my self? I relented the day he left rehab only after 17 days, because his insurance would not cover any more time or treatment. NONE period.***

***Finally reaching my destination, the Hospital. I aggressively and angrily pulled in the parking lot, parking almost next to the emergency doors. Bounced out of the car kicking the car door open and running to the doors of the ER. I stood there, on the mat, I will never forget it, tears pouring down my cheeks, my heart pounding viciously so much my chest was moving my shirt with every heart beat, and with every minute I stayed on that mat the doors opened and closed, open and closed, automatically.....I was scared to see and more afraid of that which I knew I could not control, I looked up into the sky and I prayed, "God grant me the Serenity to accept the things I could not change; Courage to change the things I can, Wisdom to know the difference." I was so blank mentally, I had no idea what I was about to see nor what I was even saying, but I knew it had been a source and tool for me for my six years of sobriety and the only thing I could bring myself to say at that moment was the Serenity Prayer.***

***There were two nurses waiting for me to take me to my son's room, we rode the elevator 2 floors and I repeated questions, wanted answers, spoke loudly, demanded results, begged them to tell me what the results were and the outcome...well they said nothing...they kept quiet.***

***We arrived to the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor ICU. They kindly escorted me to his room. I was shaking uncontrollably, my heart pounding, my shirt wet from sweat and tears; I turned the corner and walked in the room. There he was, my handsome 25 year old son, blonde hair, big blues eyes, 5'10" 165lbs. An intelligent, vibrant, artistic athlete, who tried out for the Hershey Bears***

***Hockey Team a few years prior.... I stood at the foot of his gurney, noticing his wrists, and ankles were tied securely to the gurney, his head slightly secured also and his big blue eyes opening and closing all at the same time his hands and legs convulsed. The nurses explained that his body was convulsing because of his brain misfiring.....MISFIRING???? I SAID!! MY GOD.....tell me it's going to be ok...PLEASE TELL ME!!!! TELL ME IT'S going to subside and go away...please TELL ME IT'S JUST PART of the overdose...PLEASE TELL ME !!!! Standing at the foot of his gurney screaming "GET UP SON, YOU WILL BE OK, PLEASE GOD PLEASE JASON GET UP!!!"***

***It was the most vile, horrendous, painful thing I ever saw...and it was happening to my son and I was powerless and insanely lost. They explained it is because of the overdose, the brains way of reacting to not getting enough oxygen because his heart stopped but was revived, but the outcome was not favorable because it was determined that he was 3<sup>rd</sup> level Brain Stem Dead...not even the basic functions of his breathing were working and he needed a machine. I collapsed in the corner of his room, crying and sobbing.***

***I then stood and began to make deals with GOD, I prayed, I begged, I pleaded with God. Some minutes went by, I calmly leaned over by his side...ran my fingers through his beautiful blonde hair, leaned over and I kissed him, I whispered, I love you you're gonna be ok, I love you, I love you so much son, I'm so proud of you... I.....love....you....I.....I.....love.....you.***

***People were coming in and out of the room, greeting my ex-wife and I and I decided to go to the chapel and 'have a talk with God'.....I wanted to make a deal, it should have been me countless times over, it is not the way things are supposed to be, I explained to God, as if He didn't know. It's not what a daddy is supposed to do. Daddy's aren't supposed to do this.***

***After a gut retching, painful, emotional, spiritual, physical bankrupting 5 days...we pulled the plug at 7:29 am March 23, 1998. No words can describe it. None, PERIOD.***

***This real life situation has been repeated in the state of Pennsylvania in 2015 over 3300 times with the same result. This is an increase of approximately 23% from 2014. Just in my county of Columbia this year, we have had 19 overdose deaths to date and one of them just within the last 3 weeks was a friend of mine whom I have known for 26 years and his son overdosed and died from a fentanyl patch. He was 22 years old.***

***Some are saved from expedient EMS personnel or bystanders and the use of Narcan, but other's lost forever.***

***If you will allow me to set the stage of prior events:***

*I'm a person of recovery. I used drugs and drank alcohol for almost 20 years, wearing masks of all different types for all different types of situations, to cover my secret of addiction, but in the end I couldn't hide my addiction any longer.*

*After a 28 stay in a rehab and with everything they directed me to do, I got out, and did very little they asked of me. I wasn't ready and thought I knew more than they did. After about 4 months I was back at the same life style and it was as if I never stopped. About 2 years later, I got arrested for a hit and run, dui and other charges. That was September 8, 1991 and on September 9, 1991 after a night of vomiting blood, and other physical reactions to a .368 and having suicide in the forefront of my mind coupled with the feeling of my soul being ripped out of me, I surrendered to the idea I finally needed help and accepted it and have been clean and sober since.*

*In the literature provided most who enter recovery it is said, "there is no bankruptcy like this and how it removes people, loved one's, jobs, basic social privilege's and our minds and belief systems."*

*Like my son, myself and many other's, 21 or 28 days just isn't enough for someone who has been using for any period of time. Long term care, 90 days or more, as it is being studied for it's effectiveness, is far better and more effective than a 21 or 28 day rehabilitation for the process of beginning recovery.*

*6 years prior to my son's death, I re-established a healthy and vibrant relationship with him. Because of an early divorce by his mother's choice and followed by a 20 year additive lifestyle from my lifes' choices, we re-established a loving and meaningful relationship filled with productive social, sports and family activities, which helped foster and build a positive and honest loving father-son relationship. Though through the years of my addiction I did see him, but it was not regular and not healthy and not productive; my parents were watching me diminish physically, mentally and socially as they helped maintain a loving atmosphere for their grandson; my son Jason. When I got clean and sober, we all re-established our relationships with a positive and pleasant communication and approach; for the most part things were going very well.*

*After about 4 years I started to notice behaviors that were all too familiar. So I accelerated the dialog with his mother about addiction, though not received well at first, she finally started to see some of the behaviors noticeable of an addicts behavior. We continually dialoged and tried to set boundaries and goals and objectives, but addicts sometimes have to have the bottom raised to help them recognize that they need help. I understood this because I am one and I know that no one gets better unless they hit some bottom, either, emotional, physical, social, financial, mental or vocational..*

*Finally I got a phone call from South Philadelphia from a gentleman saying that my son was on a park bench passed out with blood coming out of his arm and he was just letting me know, I thanked him and then called the police, they responded, "we're sorry, he's just*

*passed out, not committing a crime and we can't do anything.".....I thanked them and I didn't go and get him, because he wasn't asking for help, someone else was calling for him and he didn't even know it and I knew that the likely hood of him using again was great if I went and 'rescued' him than him calling and recognizing his dilemma so, I prayed for three days...then he called.....he said, "Dad, I have no money, I have no job, I have no girlfriend, I have no driver's license, I have no car, I have no place to live.....a long pause on the phone .....and I said something that no father or mother should have to say, and there's no easy way to say it, but, I told him "son, you're right were you're supposed to be and this is your chance to get help and I can help you with that" He got quiet he said, well ok I wanna talk to mom and I said, good I call her and tell her to call you right away.. So with the participation of my ex-wife and a little willingness on his part we got him in rehab. We did all the things necessary to facilitate his occupancy in a rehab...he was covered for 17 days.....I went to two rehabs one for 28 and one for 21 and the 21day rehab was an intensive relapse rehab specializing in relapse prevention and maintenance of recovery. All paid for with insurance.*

*My son had to leave treatment after 17 days because his insurance would not cover more time and treatment.....I screamed, I begged, I demanded to those at the rehab.....but to no avail. I didn't have the financial capability and my ex-wife thought it would be ok that he leave as long as he go to the half-way house that was scheduled for him. She didn't think she had the financial capacity to provide more time for treatment either.*

*But ultimately I thought, why wasn't there any organization or institution or government agency who provided or had MONEY for maybe another 4 days, or 7 days or whatever it takes??? Why??*

*I didn't know what Act 106 was at that time and wasn't aware of what type of health plan he had, because he was under his mother's plan. I was just following direction of the so-called experts, because he was in the rehab I went through 6years prior and I trusted them. Maybe we should have more strict guidelines, stronger enforcement for this NOT to happen again. So there would be NO QUESTION about money.....just recovery.*

*I will ask this question the rest of my life and will play the "what if, only if, I should have, could have, would have" record of anguish of a chance at life being clean and sober for my son with treatment vs. the tragedy of a young life snuffed out because maybe, what if, only if, what would have happened if.....there was more money for a few more days, a few more moments, a few more counseling sessions, a few more hours. .... a few more hugs.*

*What if?*

*In loving Memory of Jason P. Heffline, March 23, 1998*

*I love you son.*

*Daddy*

*Respectfully submitted,*

*Dale Heffline*