

Good morning Senator Grassley,

Thank you for inviting us today.

My name is Deric Kidd. My wife, Kathy and I are the co-founders of BecomeTheirVoice.org and advocates for The Lost Voices of Fentanyl.

Our son, Sebastian Alexander Kidd was entering his senior year. He was a multisport athlete, active in church, a musician, loved hunting and fishing, and could grill a mean steak. He was a friend, cousin, brother, and son. He was known for his beautiful eyes, infectious smile, and wonderful heart. A truly beautiful person who put others first.

Our son suffered multiple traumas in his life. He was a child of divorce, abandoned by his birth mother at age 11, lost 3 grandparents to cancer, severely bullied and falsely labeled in school. He broke his collarbone his freshman year, and also suffered multiple concussions. He was diagnosed with anxiety and depression and was put on medication for all of these reasons. Our son went through absolute hell and still put a smile on his face every day.

He was introduced to Percocet by a friend. He began self-medicating with pills purchased through SnapChat. He didn't know the pills were fake and contained fentanyl. He couldn't stop taking them, however, he was able to get some of his friends to stop and even talked some of them out of suicide so we know he knew it was wrong.

You see, it was important to him to save others because he knew their pain. But he couldn't save himself. He took half a pill on July 30th, 2021 before bed, and never woke up. We found him slumped over his bed the next morning. That image will haunt me for life. He was supposed to leave that day for a long-awaited trip to Arizona with his aunt and uncle. He never made it. Sebastian didn't want to die. If the half-pill he took had actually been Percocet, he would still be here. He would still have a chance.

Now let me tell you what I lost. I lost a piece of me that day. The boy I raised to be a man, to always do the right thing, to stand up for people, to put others first and love everyone, to respect his elders, and treat everyone with kindness. I lost the boy I coached in soccer for 10 years knowing that when his senior year came, they would make a run at the state championship. I lost proudly walking with him on senior night with his arms around his mom and me, watching him get ready for prom, and walk down the aisle to get his diploma.

I lost seeing my son and daughter go from having a love-hate relationship to being two of the closest siblings you could ever imagine. I lost hearing the constant laughter, bantering and sarcasm between them.

I lost seeing him get married and giving my speech at his wedding. Telling him that marriage and love are hard but worth every second. I lost seeing him dance with his mama, seeing my son's face when he had his first child, knowing he was going to be a better father than I ever was. Knowing that my wife will likely never hold a grandchild in her arms because now our daughter doesn't want to have kids anymore. We not only lost a child that day, we lost our future grandkids.

I lost the moment when he would beat me in a round of golf for the first time, the joy and peace I experienced with my fishing buddy on those brisk early mornings. Seeing him age gracefully and watching him grow up with his own children.

The most important thing I lost were the talks we had. The slow transition from me giving advice to my son, to me taking it from him. With no disrespect to my wife and daughter, I lost everything that day because I cannot be the man that I was or the man I wanted to be with such a huge part of me gone. The three of us are left to pick up the pieces and try and put this puzzle back together but we are always going to be missing a piece.

All these families across the nation are experiencing their own pain. All we can do is turn our pain into purpose which is why we created the becometheirvoice.org website. It's a place where we can all tell their stories and show their beautiful faces. We give presentations in schools and youth groups to educate the public in hopes of preventing this from happening to others. To make sure their deaths weren't for nothing. We all do it to help save lives.

We came here today to speak on our son's behalf and let his voice be heard. But more importantly, we came here today to speak on behalf of those that cannot be heard, the other grieving families and victims.

This is an endless cycle. This isn't just about our son or any of the lost loved ones we are discussing here today. It isn't just about the hundreds of thousands of Americans that we've lost over the years and continue to lose every day. It's also about the collateral damage left behind. It's about my wife who deals with the guilt and grief daily. It's about my daughter who struggles to function some days because of her pain and guilt. It's about my son's friends who have chosen to self-medicate because they are struggling with his death. I've taken phone calls from parents because their kids have since started to self-medicate and one even overdosed. You see, it isn't just one death. Each one trickles down and touches the lives of dozens, if not hundreds of people. Now they have to deal with the pain and the grief and the internal turmoil which may cause them to self-medicate and suffer the same fate. There is much work to be done.