

Good morning Co-Chair Grassley. My name is Brooke Anderson, I am the mother of Devin Anderson who was found deceased in his bedroom on the morning of February 24<sup>th</sup> of this year. His toxicology analysis showed that he did not have any other drugs in his body other than fentanyl and nicotine. Prior to my son's death, I had never heard anything about synthetic fentanyl in the United States. The hearts of Devin's family members have been completely shattered by his devastating loss. I attend mental health therapy as well as both of my younger two children now. I am here to tell you that Devin's struggles were not a death sentence until he discovered a counterfeit pill called an M-30. The spread of fentanyl has been steady and deadly in Iowa and across the United States. The CDC estimates that more than 108,000 people in the U.S. died of drug overdoses between February 2021 and February 2022. Of those, more than 70% involved fentanyl and other synthetic opioids. This is a national emergency.

America's young adults are being deceived and poisoned every 5 minutes.

Devin was well known for his contagious laughter, his smile, his love for the Dallas Cowboys and also the Iowa Hawkeyes. He loved cats, spending time with his friends and family, listening to music, and playing video games. He was kind, caring, a hard worker, and very laid back. While growing up as a child and throughout his teenage years in high school he was active in football, soccer and wrestling. After high school, he continued to be active by playing golf during the summer months and playing in a softball tournament every July 4<sup>th</sup> with his dad. He enjoyed watching football and hanging out with friends regularly. Devin had worked a full time job since he was 16 years old and prior to his death he had just been given a raise by his employer.

Despite his supportive family, many friendships, hard work and solid earnings, he struggled with the transition from being a teen to a young adult. In 2020, I began noticing some signs that

Devin was possibly depressed. He had quit his job and didn't work for a period of time, he lived off money he had in his savings account, began selling things he had previously bought so that he could pay bills, I was getting texts at weird hours in the middle of the night, and he had begun to lose weight. His change in behavior was noticeable, and very much out of character for him.

In the spring of 2021, I got a phone call, just a few weeks apart, from both Devin's dad and my sister. They began questioning me about whether I was under any impression that Devin was using drugs. Like so many parents, I made excuses for him. "No, he's just depressed." "He wouldn't do drugs, there's no way." I was that parent. You know, the one who says "Not my child." You see, this is all part of the stigma of both mental health and substance abuse. Our kids are afraid to admit when they have a problem because even as adults, we don't even want to admit our kids have a problem. There is shame that is associated with mental health and addiction and unless you have ever felt that shame yourself or watched a loved one experience it, I am not sure you can truly understand what I am talking about.

Devin died in my home and was found February 24<sup>th</sup>, in his room, with his door closed, by himself. Narcan would not have saved his life. I could not have saved his life. His brothers could not have saved his life. Fentanyl is a silent killer, I didn't even know that my son was dead until I got a phone call at 6:35 am from his boss stating he had been trying to reach Devin for 30 minutes and he had not been answering his phone. And even then, I still had no idea what was going on. I was 30 miles from home at a wrestling workout with my youngest son and my middle son had gone down the stairs when he heard Devin's phone ringing multiple times only to find him unresponsive. My middle son heard Devin's coworker knocking at the door, went to

the door and told him Devin was not waking up and asked him to come inside to help. His coworker immediately called 911 and performed CPR on him until EMT's arrived. By the time I got home, my son had been pronounced dead and the Sherriff was sitting in my bedroom with my middle child. I was in shock, there were so many EMT's everywhere. I was never prepared for the loss of my child. Every day since, February 24<sup>th</sup>, I have turned my pain into a purpose. I have become Devin's voice and his life mattered. I have started a non profit organization called Devin's Forever 23 Foundation, Inc. and it is my mission to spread awareness and education to communities across Iowa. With the help of parents like Deric and Kathy Kidd who started Becometheirvoice.org, I am now able to go into the AHSTW Community School District following this field hearing and give a PowerPoint presentation that I am hoping will speed the process along a bit in terms of spreading awareness to junior high and high school youth. If every single one of us work together to create a difference, we not only impact one person's life, but we impact everyone influenced by them throughout their entire lifetime. One by one, we will create a ripple effect. I beg you, do not turn a blind eye and ignore this Fentanyl Epidemic our country is facing right now. It's going to take a village to make a change. Let's be the change our children and our future generations need!

Thank you for this opportunity,

Brooke Anderson