

February 27, 2009

Madam Chair Ritter, Chairman Harris and Members of the Public Health Committee,

My name is Evelyn Pontbriant and this is my husband, Larry. We are from Norwich, CT, and we are speaking in favor of SB 981, the AEDs IN SCHOOLS Bill.

I would like to draw your attention at this time to this poster. This is our son, Larry. He's 15 years old here. He looks like James Dean. This is a photograph I took of him on the Long Island Ferry. He was on his way to Hofstra to play with his select lacrosse team in a tournament there. When he cut off his curls to play summer lacrosse, it didn't go over well with the female population. Less than a month after this picture was taken, Larry was dead.

Does he look like somebody who would have a cardiac arrest?

This picture was taken shortly before the start of a 3-mile fun run in Mohegan Park, Norwich, on August 16<sup>th</sup>, 2007, two weeks before school started. Larry's laughing with his friends, stretching before the race.

Does he seem like he's about to have a cardiac arrest?

In about 15 minutes, Larry collapsed right in front of my husband and I, our neighbor, Larry's running mate's mom who is a nurse, and her son. We were watching the race at the midway point, which was also the finish line. Larry looked like a runner that collapsed from exhaustion or dehydration, but he was neither. Larry was not responding, he wasn't breathing, his heart should have been pounding—but it was not. Our neighbor called 911. There was no AED. In a blur, CPR was started, the timer of the race now kept the time of the chest compressions. Larry's indoor track coach finished the race, realized what was happening and took over CPR. We didn't find out until later that this was Coach Johnson's second experience with cardiac arrest; his college friend also died from a cardiac arrest during a race.

In the back of my mind, I kept thinking brain damage without oxygen at 4 minutes.

Both my husband and I worked for years in hospitals as Nuclear Medicine technologists but nothing prepared us for this. How could this be happening to Larry, our only child? He was a conditioned, multi-sport athlete, rarely sick. He passed every physical with flying colors. My husband was there for him as coach throughout youth sports. We went to his practices, to all his games. There was never any sign that there was a problem.

When the EMTs arrived, they shocked Larry with their defibrillator, maybe twice? Larry's heart returned to a more normal rhythm but too much time had elapsed. He was declared brain dead 3 days later at Connecticut Children's Medical Center in Hartford. We knew our lives changed forever. But we also knew that if Larry's heart responded to a shock from a defibrillator after all that time, had there been a defibrillator on site, the outcome would have been very different.

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We set up the Larry Pontbriant Athletic Safety Fund in our son's name shortly after his death to raise awareness about sudden cardiac arrest, to purchase AEDs for athletic fields and to encourage training people in CPR and in AED use. We made available a workable emergency response plan. We did not want what happened to Larry to happen to anyone else, nor would Larry want this to happen to his friends. We want to be able to face our son someday and say we did the best we could.

Through the Fund and our local hospital, we have placed 52 AEDs at schools and with youth sports teams in southeastern Connecticut. Schools are our main focus because they are gathering places both during school hours and after school, for students and for the community, during the school year and during the summer. And schools have athletic activities. Children are not routinely checked out for cardiac problems and yet the leading cause of sudden death in young athletes is cardiac arrest. In fact, two of the AEDs we donated went to schools with kids at cardiac risk.

Although our funds are depleted now, we are currently working on fundraisers, have looked into grants, and are exploring possible partnerships with businesses and hospitals.

In conclusion, our request is simple; please support SB 981. We know the state budget is tight— with Larry's Fund, we have looked at alternative sources of funding. But we have to care for what's important to us and that is the welfare of our children. After all, cardiac arrest can happen to anyone, any time. Our best defense is to be prepared.

Thank you for your time.

Larry and Evelyn Pontbriant