

Testimony before Public Health Committee

Connecticut General Assembly

February 27, 2009

SB 981

Distinguished Chairman Harris, Madam Chair Ritter and Members of the Public Health Committee, I thank you for the opportunity to speak today on behalf of SB 981 An Act Concerning Automatic External Defibrillators in Schools. My name is Marissa Malouf and I am a student at Norwich Free Academy.

I am here today to tell you about a dear friend of mine. I met Larry Pontbriant when I was six years old. We met while playing PAL soccer and spent hours running up and down the field, kicking the soccer ball and accidentally scoring for the other team. We became great friends that season, hoping to stay that way for many years to come. Though we would still see each other frequently at CCD classes on Sundays, we grew apart, attending different elementary and middle schools.

We were reintroduced our first day of high school. We were required to participate in a team-building activity with other kids in our unit. The activity was designed to introduce us to one another, so I walked up to a familiar face, and then it hit me that the person I gravitated to was the same curly haired, funny kid, with a smile that brightened everyone's day, whom I had first made friends with at six. From that day, our friendship grew and deepened. We had almost every class together, and our similar work ethic pushed us both to excel. He made learning enjoyable just by being part of any class. As team manager, I was at almost every one of his lacrosse games, witnessing his intensity and drive to play his best. He told me stupid jokes to make me laugh when I was having a bad day. He shaved his hair so he would have a Mohawk, and wore a Superman cape that one of his lacrosse teammates had given him, to brighten everyone's day. Every moment shared with Larry was a moment remembered.

Larry's death was caused when his heart fell into a state of cardiac arrest and oxygen flow to his brain was cut off. Although an AED was used when paramedics arrived, too much time had passed making the AED ineffective. The sadness and loss I have dealt with these past two years is not a feeling I would wish upon other friends and family of someone lost in this way. I not only lost one of my closest friends that day, but I lost someone in my life that motivated me to work my hardest and achieve greatness in every aspect of my life. Through this, I have come to realize that I must do what he would have wanted - help someone else. To achieve our goal here today of placing AEDs in schools, would be an indescribably rewarding feeling. If SB 981, concerning AED placement in schools, is passed, someone's life may be saved and hopefully no other family or friend will endure such an untimely and tragic loss.

One lesson I learned from Larry, through our friendship, is to always strive for greatness and to never give up on yourself or your goals. His spirit, which I carry with me every day, is a reminder of why I am here today and how important my presence is. I try to act as Larry did, to always strive for perfection. For Larry, it did not matter if it was on the lacrosse field, in the classroom, or with his friends and family - people gravitated to him and he made us all proud. Although he will never go to prom, graduate from high school, or get married and have a family of his own, I know that instead of crying, Larry would have wanted us to make a change. This change could play a part in saving the life of someone else.

I would like to thank you all from the bottom of my heart for this wonderful opportunity. My presence here today is something that I know Larry would be grateful for - as am I. If we can all be a part of preventing the loss of another life by passing SB 981, then I would feel confident in saying that we have honored his life.