

Public Health Committee
March 2nd, 2021



Testimony in Support of HB-5583

AN ACT CONCERNING EMERGENCY INTERVENTION BY A POLICE OFFICER WHEN A PERSON SUFFERS AN OVERDOSE.

To allow a police officer to take a person into custody when the officer has reasonable cause to believe that such person is experiencing a drug overdose.

Co-Chairs Horn and Bradley; Vice Chairs Osten, Paolilo; Ranking Members Champagne and Green; and distinguished members of the Public Safety & Security Committee:

My name is DelVina Herbest, I'm part of a growing coalition of your constituents and we thank you for allowing us to submit testimony in support of HB-5583

A friend suggested I share my story with you so that you can better understand what our community is going through as you deliberate these critical proposals - so here goes:

Addiction is a terrible disease.

I've witnessed friends lose family or friends, and I always felt bad for them, but I didn't quite understand it either. To me, they chose that life, that needle, and now the consequences are their problem too. I was that person who judged and I cannot believe I thought that way. I'm disappointed in myself for being so judgmental rather than being open minded, and even worse that it took losing my losing my cousin to addiction recently for it to affect me and to truly care about this epidemic. I understand now that although someone's first time was a choice, it eventually took over who they are, what they do, everything about them and they struggled till they couldn't live without it. They became chemically dependent upon it and they were constantly fighting a battle within to overcome this disease. And some never win.

I know not all addicts are the same. Some like the risk, the high, the danger. And others want to escape their stresses, their fears, but also didn't want a life of loss and addiction. There are a million unresolved or unaddressed reasons why someone may start doing drugs, keep doing them, or never stop. Some smoke, some swallow a pill, some put a needle into their veins. They aren't looking for excuses, but there is something triggering their choice down this path.

My cousin Brian Cody Waldron chose drugs, but that does not define him as a person, because he also chose to be a better person and ask for help. He went to rehab and knew it wasn't enough time. He felt he needed more time and asked for an extension and more help because he was worried he would relapse. He was denied – his insurance wouldn't cover it. He was pleading for a better life because he didn't want to die. The real story is Brian Cody was an amazing kid with such a goofy heart. He had a fiancé, a baby girl, and another baby on the way (who is now 4 months old). He was surrounded by family and friends who loved him and who he loved with all of his heart – I know this because he was always sure to give you a hug and say "I love you!" when he saw you. He made the wrong choice that day in August 2019, one that he will never be able to take back.

We miss Brian Cody dearly. We find it not fair that he asked for help and was failed. This is a battle many addicts are faced with and it is disgusting and unjust. Depression, anxiety etc etc are not addressed properly and many people resort to drugs to escape those pains or fears. People are overdosing because they just want to get out of their heads, whereas if what persists inside their minds could be addressed in the first place, maybe they wouldn't go down the path of drugs in the first place.

I am at a loss how someone so hopeful about life and so happy to be in love who was so ready to be moving on from an addiction can all unfold in one evening and lose it all. No more chances to get it right. Questions unanswered. Fears of the unknown. The "why"s? The "could we have done more"s?! Being with my family witnessing the pain, tears and heartache at Brian Cody's funeral service was the worst feeling. We will never know why he is now gone and we will never hear his goofy laugh or see his smile again.

We want to focus our heartache on this disease, this epidemic, and we need to end the stigma. The more we talk about overdose, the more awareness there is. The more our legislature gets involved to create and enforce these new proposed laws, the more lives we can save and more success stories can be told to help those out there who are still struggling or are in recovery. I am doing all the best I can to learn about addiction. The more educated we all become, the more united we are to fight this epidemic and end overdose!

I am incredibly proud of my Uncle and Aunt (Tony and Tracey Morrissey) for their passion and dedication to shed light on this epidemic and bring hope and conversation around change. They have met with the President of ESPN, the Attorney General of Connecticut, the New Milford Community Care Coordinator, CT State Representatives, New Milford PD, Ambulance Corps, news outlets, CT Attorney General, to share their story and encourage them to help introduce new legislation in Brian Cody's Law.

They have also met with community members to listen to their stories of heartache and let them know no one is alone in this fight! They have had signs made in support of loved ones lost and those in recovery – an idea inspired by Columbia County's Pathways to Recovery during their candlelight walk for hope in recovery "Let's Walk for One more Chance" that I attended in September 2019. My husband and our children joined me on this walk in my cousin's honor. People lined the streets with images of their loved ones, holding family members photos while walking through town and honoring those in recovery. It was really moving to see how many people showed up to support such a wonderful cause.

We are not asking for handouts, we are not asking for sympathy, we are simply sharing our story which could potentially have an impact on another person struggling or their family member looking for resources. We may live in NY now, but my husband and myself were both born and raised in New Milford, CT. Our family still lives there. Our parents, nephews, neices, siblings, etc. We are asking for our lawmakers to make a move at this critical time and help our community in need!! There have been too many losses already, too many people waiting day by day to get the help they need. We want them to know they are not alone and we are rooting for their success. They need YOUR help - lets combat this opioid epidemic NOW! Where there is hope, there is a way!!

#BrianCodysLaw #endoverdose #endthestigma #nomore shame #letstalkaboutaddiction #opioidcrisis #dancinginthesky #wherethereishopethereisaway



I simply ask you to strongly consider taking the following action:

- *Review and support HB-5583, as well as a package of similar proposals that our foundation refers to as Brian Cody's Law.*
- *Understand that hundreds members affiliated with Brian Cody's Law are in support of this proposal, sponsored by State Representative Carol Hall, from the fifty-ninth assembly district.*
- *Consider as well that Brian Cody's Law calls supports any proposal that provides enhanced support systems to help those struggling with opioid addiction, stricter penalties for suppliers of lethal overdoses, better oversight of tracking opioids and waste, and ending safe havens – such as 'trap houses' where numerous overdoses occur on a frequent basis.*
- *Please also consider that Brian Cody's law opposes taking addicted people into 'custody', we should not continue the 'lock our way out of this' approach - but rather our organization suggests a 72 hour hold and urges the client be placement into a clinical setting with appropriate supports in place.*
- *Read up on the factors that are driving this effort forward on our website BrianCodysLaw.org and take action with us.*

In this last decade, 500,000 Americans lost their lives to opioid use disorder. In 2020 alone, right here in your state, overdose deaths hit historic levels. Again! Thousands of citizens here in Connecticut have died since our organization's initial requests were filed. This simply cannot continue!

Do we have your support?