

Chairman Smith, Vice Chair Ryan, Ranking member Cera and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for allowing me to offer proponent testimony on House Bill 508.

March 22nd 2017 is a day in my life that I will never forget for two reasons. First, a child that I had known since the age of three had taken their own life at the young age of fourteen. Second, it's the day I said to myself that I will do whatever it takes to make sure this outcome does not happen to another child in the same situation. As an officer of law, I had to conduct an investigation over this tragic loss. This child was a child born to drug addicts. This child did not have someone to look to for guidance or inspiration or aspiration. This child should have had their entire life in front of them, but it was cut short because they did not have hope. This child rather end their life than grow up to become the kind of adult they knew with addiction. This child died not knowing there is a way out, there are people that care, and that their parent's life did not have to be their life. At the close of this investigation, the conclusion that I came to was that society did not step up or step in when this innocent child had been let down.

Through this investigation, I was able to get to know Chloe, Autumn, Payzlee, Daisy, Jenna, Desi, Kaitlin, Ashtyn, Raelynn, and Faith. These girls are faced with the same sort of life of that fourteen-year-old. They are caught in the wheel of destruction caused by addiction. The more time I spent with these girls the more I learned about the sad state of their reality. I learned how big their hopelessness truly is and the need for intervention. And the closer we became and the more they opened up to me, the more I realized they were saying the same things as the child that took their own life. I made a promise to these kids that I would do everything in my power to show them there is another way of life and to be available anytime they needed and get them the kind of help that they deserve.

When these kids saw and realized how serious I was being about their future is when I believe everything changed. They started telling me that they do not want to be like their parents. They want to have a life and they want hope. They want to grow up and be happy and enjoy everything life has to offer. They want a life that growing up with support would give them. They want to graduate from high school and go on to some kind of higher education. But what they don't have is someone that can show and teach them how to do that. Before I wrote this, I asked this group of kids what they wanted me to say because this is all about them. One of the responses was, "well, our families don't have any money to send us to college". I asked them if anyone has even talked to them about how to even go to college, how to fill out scholarships or financial aid, or what kind of classes they need to take in high school to prepare college. The first answer I got was "not a clue".

This is more proof of the power that this bill can do for so many kids and it makes me more determined to keep going, since I know it is the right direction. To be able to help change the path of some of these kids and to provide them hope is why I am here supporting this bill. To give them a chance for a way out, so that they don't have to be like their parents. That there are opportunities out there for them to succeed in life. At our recent press conference in Columbus, when we came up they were able to meet some of the Presidents of the Universities who are involved, I got to witness something most people never will. I got to witness what hope looks like. The excitement and joy the kids had that day is why I believe this will work. Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 508. I will be happy to answer any questions that you may have.