

Chairman Huffman, Vice-Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Health Committee, thank you for allowing me to provide proponent testimony on HB 485, "Cody's Law," which would designate January 30<sup>th</sup> as Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy Awareness Day, also known as CTE.

My name is Heidi Hamblin, and this bill is named for my brother, Cody, a victim of CTE.

On the morning of May 29, 2016, I was getting ready to make the drive to my grandpa's house on Lake Lorelei to cook out and spend the night with the family for the long Memorial Day weekend. Little did I know, our family would never be together again.

My brother wanted a long break from Ohio University and his summer classes, and since he was always a fisherman, he and his girlfriend went to my grandpa's for the full weekend so he could get more time on the lake in. He called my mom around 9:30 am that Sunday – Audrey was still at the cabin sleeping because he and my grandpa had been out on the lake since 6 am. Cody was eager for my mom, dad, and me to arrive. As they were talking about what we would be eating for lunch, he suddenly stopped talking. My mom figured he had a catch because she could hear my grandpa yelling at him in the background, but then my grandpa started yelling for help; my dad called 911 from his cell phone in the car and my mom remained on the line for as long as she could stand. It was hard to get information, as no one wanted to upset us while we were traveling. We were told to go to Miami Valley Hospital, but we didn't need to. My brother passed away before my grandpa and the care flight team's eyes.

Cody had suffered a seizure while he was standing to fish off the side of the boat, causing him to drop his phone on the boat floor and fall into the lake. He immediately started sinking, and my grandpa couldn't catch him before he reached the lake floor. It took 45 minutes for search and rescue to find Cody in the sediment, but the care flight team was ready. They began working on Cody and received a pulse. Moments later, the helicopter engines faded as my grandpa was told there was nothing more they could do.

How could this have happened? Cody was 22, healthy, and a great swimmer. This has to be a mistake. A seizure? He's never had one. Throughout the confusion, my dad reached out to neuroscientists about this devastating oddity. They were very interested in studying Cody's brain and the coroner wanted more information before they finalized the autopsy report. Cody was found to have Stage 2 CTE, chronic traumatic encephalopathy, in 3 parts of his brain; this disease can only be identified postmortem. This did not come as a surprise to my family, as we had just learned about CTE months before Cody's death. The coroner ruled Cody's death by drowning caused by a seizure due to CTE.

Audrey, Cody's girlfriend, was obtaining her bachelor's in neuroscience at OSU and was learning about the effects of repeated head trauma; she thought Cody presented many symptoms of CTE, the newest class topic. Cody confided in me that he also feared he had this disease. A week before his death, while sleeping over at my house, Cody told me he wanted to see a doctor. My dad had also been doing independent research and thought Cody fit the description for CTE. He was finding support groups for Cody to join, but I was still in the dark about just how serious this was.

In the last year or so, I have done more research. CTE is a degenerative, and progressive, brain disease found in athletes, military, and other persons with a history of repetitive head trauma. Tau, a protein, forms, and spreads, killing brain cells. Symptoms begin appearing years after initial head trauma. Alzheimer's, dementia, and other devastating brain disorders are common in those with CTE. There is currently no cure. It is important to note that you never have to experience a concussion to

develop CTE. New research has shown that athletes who begin playing contact sports at younger ages have a greater risk, as exposure to head impacts before the age of 12 are associated with worse outcomes. The duration of head impacts is also an important factor in the development of CTE. Symptoms include changes in mood and behavior, such as depression and suicidal thoughts, impaired judgment, and substance. Affected persons have problems with thinking and memory, including memory loss and confusion.

My brother was a terrific athlete, baseball, football, track, basketball, you name it. I remember going with my parents to sign Cody up for peewee football at Rice Field when he was in the second grade – he was excited, we all were! But we didn't know this would be his death sentence. He continued to play football throughout his school career, including an attempt in college. He was told by the Mount Saint Joseph team doctor that his back was too damaged to take any more hits without devastating consequences. For some reason, we never thought about his brain. Shortly after that news, things spiraled quickly. My brother had substance abuse issues, issues remembering conversations and plans, and trouble with schoolwork – we blamed the environment and Cody for not making better decisions. Not long after, he made some suicidal comments and they notified my parents (thank goodness) – he was taken to the hospital where they sent him to a facility for a week. Still, none of us thought anything of the head trauma he had been subject to for over 15 years. He continued to see a therapist, who also did not contribute these behaviors to anything more than depression – he was prescribed medicine and that was that. In the year before his death, Cody became directionally challenged, so much so that he would get lost driving; he would forget conversations that had just occurred moments ago. His sleep was erratic – he'd fall asleep in the middle of the day, unable to be awoken. There are so many examples of symptomatic behavior, oblivious to me at the time, which keep me up at night; of course, I can't remember these right now.

The guilt my parents feel is immense – I can only imagine, as mine is heavy. Had we known more about CTE during those hard times at the end of high school and in his college career, we could have gotten Cody the proper help, although his fate was already sealed. Had we, or even Cody known, perhaps we would have waited until after adolescence to start contact sports. In my grief, I've connected with over 100 families also affected by this terrible disease – many have lost loved ones, but there are a few who are now caretakers for their affected family member. One of their initiatives last year was to create "CTE Awareness Day" in order to help raise awareness of this terrible disease. With more information available, people can make more informed decisions, lessening those affected by the disease. We can work towards better safety standards, lessening risk factors, and more support for those suffering from traumatic brain injuries – perhaps even a cure.

California, Iowa, Indiana, Pennsylvania, and Texas have all officially recognized CTE Awareness Day. I ask that Ohio joins them in honor of Cody and all others lost to CTE side effects.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 485. I would be happy to answer any questions.