

Proponent Testimony of Nicholas Stallard on Senate Bill 220

Hello Chairman Burke, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee. Thank you for allowing to me to testify on Senate Bill 220. My name is Nick Stallard, I am a survivor, and this is my story.

As a freshman in high school I discovered through a routine physical that I had a heart murmur. Murmurs are not uncommon and often do not pose any serious risk. Because this murmur was new, I was encouraged to have it investigated. A week later I was diagnosed with a condition known as (BAVD) Bicuspid Aortic Valve Disease.

This is a condition in which the aortic valve does not form properly at birth. A normal valve will have three leaflets that open and close in unison allowing blood to flow from the heart through the aorta and into the rest of the body. A bicuspid valve will have two leaflets fused together and often does not open and close properly in sync with the remaining leaflet.

At the time I was diagnosed I was not aware of what other possible problems could arise from the condition. I pulled back from contact sports and refocused my energy into other activities. I knew I had a heart condition, but I did not know that it could become something much more dire.

I later graduated from college and began working full time at the Ohio House. Now being an adult and learning that it was time to take care of myself, I decided to follow up on a recommendation from my PCP and have my heart reexamined. At this point it had been almost 8 years since my last checkup.

When I met with the cardiologist and explained my condition, he agreed that it was time to take another look. What happened next would change my life.

After the ultrasound and CT scan I was told by a nurse that the doctor would contact me in a day or two to discuss the results. As I was buttoning up my shirt the doctor came back in to the room and said he was going to refer me to a cardiothoracic surgeon. He said that I should schedule an appointment as soon as possible.

My family and I met with the surgeon and we were informed that my bicuspid valve had been causing a serious issue to occur at the root of my aorta, where it attaches to the valve and heart. Due to the nature of my condition, blood had been hitting my aortic wall at a higher velocity and at an unnatural angle for so long, 26 years, that it had caused my aortic wall to bulge and begin to deteriorate. I was now at a very high risk of my aorta rupturing. I was dangerously close to an aortic aneurysm.

Being told at 26 that you are living with what amounts to be a time bomb in your chest and the only remedy being open heart surgery, which itself has major risks, was terrifying. Luckily, I was made aware in time and the proper steps were put in place to mitigate the risk until I was able to have the surgery.

In October of 2017 I had the procedure to repair my bicuspid valve and replace the damaged section of my aorta. There were complications during the surgery, but thanks to the skilled team of surgeons at the Cleveland Clinic the operation was a success.

I consider myself truly lucky and blessed. Often this condition is asymptomatic, and people go their entire lives not knowing that any breath could be their last. Had I not gone to see my doctor when I did, I would not be here today.

This condition is uncommon, but we have all heard of those who lost their lives to it. According to the University of North Carolina Health Talk “Albert Einstein, Lucille Ball, George C. Scott, and John Ritter have all died from aortic disease. Einstein and Scott suffered from abdominal aortic aneurysms while Ritter and Ball experienced aortic dissections, or a tear in the inner wall of their aortas.”

In conclusion, I want to thank Senator Manning for introducing this legislation and you, the committee, for hearing my story. The largest ally this condition has is its lack of awareness. I encourage you to support this legislation so that we together can help save the lives of those who might be living undiagnosed with what could become an aortic aneurysm.

I am happy to answer any questions.