

Chairman Edwards, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the Ohio House Finance Committee, I am honored for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB434, The Traumatic Brain Injury Treatment Accelerator Pilot Program (TBITXL). My name is Gary Rellar, and I am here to share the story of my son, Nick.

In 2005, at the age of 20, Nick was involved in a serious car accident. Although his appearance suggests that he suffered spinal cord damage, neurosurgeons clarified that Nick had actually suffered a severe traumatic brain injury. Receiving the call from the police station informing me of my son's accident was every parent's worst nightmare. Nick remained in a coma for seven harrowing days before finally regaining consciousness. Following this, he spent an additional two months in the intensive care unit, where doctors worked tirelessly to alleviate the pressure in his brain. During this challenging time, my wife and I refused to leave Nick's side, choosing to stay in a hotel room across from the hospital to be close to him. Upon his release from the hospital, my wife became his full-time caretaker at home while Nick underwent years of therapy and rehabilitation to relearn basic skills such as walking and talking. Throughout his therapy sessions and support group meetings, we encountered many other families grappling with similar challenges. Witnessing the struggles of those less fortunate than Nick underscored the severity of traumatic brain injuries and the urgent need for effective treatments.

However, one year after his initial injury, Nick began experiencing severe convulsive seizures, adding another layer of complexity to his already challenging recovery journey. The number of physicians and care teams involved in Nick's treatment was astounding, yet the challenges persisted. Today, Nick continues to struggle with memory, walking, and speech impairments. Throughout his rehabilitation journey, we have incurred significant out-of-pocket expenses for essential items such as chair lifts and specialized transportation vehicles.

Over the past 15 years, technological advancements have been exponential, and Nick has benefited from assistive products such as iPad apps and wheelchair attachments. However, while these technologies have helped improve his quality of life to some extent, there are still no significant advancements in medications to address the underlying damage caused by his traumatic brain injury.

Nick's accident taught us that life can change in an instant, and we have learned never to take anything for granted. As parents, we would do anything to keep our child alive and our family together. Learning about Ohio's opportunity to fund groundbreaking treatments for severe traumatic brain injuries compelled me to speak up. I urge you to make the right decision and provide hope to individuals like Nick, who deserve the chance to regain their dignity and lead fulfilling lives.

Chairman Edwards, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the Ohio House Finance Committee, thank you for hearing my testimony. I can answer any questions you have at this time.

