

Testimony in Opposition to HB 587

Ohio House Committee

Chairman, Vice Chair, and members of the committee,

My name is Jennifer Young. I am the mother of Johnny Loring. He was my firstborn child. He was funny. He made people laugh. He still called me just to check in. I am here because I have to be his voice.

April 18, 2024, started as a normal, happy day. Johnny was leaving for a traditional yearly trip to Wayne National Forest with his dad, his uncle, and friends to hunt morel mushrooms. It was something he looked forward to every year.

As he walked out the door that morning, the last words he said to me were, “I love you too, Mom.”

That was the last time I saw my son alive.

Johnny was not reckless. He was not trying to harm himself. Like many young people dealing with anxiety, he found something he believed would help. He drank kratom tea twice a day. He bought it at a storefront that looked legitimate — clean counters, labeled products, friendly staff. He was told it was safe. Natural. An organic supplement.

Johnny used whole-leaf, natural kratom. Toxicology did not identify synthetic kratom compounds or laboratory-modified analogs in his system. There was no evidence that he used standalone 7-hydroxymitragynine or enhanced extracts. What he consumed was marketed as plain, natural leaf kratom.

He did not take an unusually large amount that day. He took what he had been told was safe.

My son was found face down in the dirt after suffering a violent seizure. His tongue was bitten in half from the force of it.

He trusted that if something was sold openly and legally, someone had made sure it would not kill him.

That trust cost him his life.

After Johnny died, I began learning what I wish I had known before. The risks associated with kratom, including seizures and dependency, are documented. Scientific literature exists. Public health agencies have issued warnings. The Ohio Board of Pharmacy reviewed the evidence and applied the law.

They evaluated eight statutory factors. They examined the potential for abuse, the lack of accepted medical use, and the absence of established safety under medical supervision. They voted unanimously to classify mitragynine as Schedule I.

Unanimously.

These are the experts appointed to protect Ohio families.

HB 587 would override that decision.

This is not an abstract policy discussion to me. It is not political. It is personal. I buried my son.

When products are sold on shelves in storefronts, parents and young people assume someone has reviewed them. They assume someone has evaluated the risks. They assume that if something is legal and openly available, it has been vetted.

Johnny believed that.

You cannot bring my son back. But you can decide whether the expert review process in this state matters. You can decide whether the unanimous findings of Ohio's drug experts stand.

I am asking you to uphold the Board's decision.

Not for me.

For the next mother who still has time.

My son's name is Johnny Loring. He was funny. He made people laugh. And the last thing he said to me was, "I love you too, Mom."

Please let his story mean something.

Thank you.