

Avery Speaks:

Good morning, everyone.

My name is Avery Russell. I'm 12 years old, and this fall, I'll be entering the 7th grade.

Almost a year ago, my life changed forever.

It was supposed to be a normal day—a simple playdate with a friend. But that day ended in something no child should ever experience. I was violently attacked by two vicious pit bulls; I was just trying to use the restroom. I never imagined something so ordinary would turn into something so tragic.

I truly thought I was going to die. I remember the fear—how it felt like the world had stopped. I was in excruciating pain, unable to move, and I just kept thinking, “I want my mom.” I felt completely hopeless... until I heard a voice—a police officer—saying he was there to help me. I couldn't see clearly, my vision was blurry, but I felt him lift me up and say, “You're going to be okay.”

The last thing I remember was being placed in the ambulance, a mask covering my face, and everything going black. I was still terrified—but somehow, I also felt that maybe, just maybe, I had been saved.

I was rushed to The Nationwide Children's Hospital—as Mom calls it; She says we have to put respect on their name. She's right! They saved me!

When I got there, I heard my mom's voice. All I wanted was to reach out, grab her, and cry on her shoulder. But I couldn't move. I was in so much pain, but I didn't want to scare her even more... so I just gently squeezed her hand when she asked if I could hear her.

Then I heard my IMO (Korean for aunt) Julianne's voice too. They both told me I was going to be okay—and in that moment, I chose to believe them.

I was rushed into a 9-hour surgery, and then placed in a medically induced coma for a week. In total, I spent three weeks in the hospital. That was just the beginning.

Since then, I've had five surgeries. Number six is coming in August.

I've had to relearn how to move, how to speak, how to feel safe in my own skin. I've gone through physical therapy, various types of occupational therapy, speech therapy, trauma therapy to help me process the trauma. The doctors and surgeons told me that I probably would lose all motion and movement in the lower left side of my face. They told me because of the nerve damage I would never be able to smile again. I was determined to prove them wrong; and today I stand before you with a smile as bright as the sun.

But the hardest moment wasn't the surgeries or the pain.

It was the first time I saw myself.

I didn't recognize the face looking back at me. I actually scared myself. That moment broke something in me. My mom, my aunts, and the nurses rushed to cover the mirrors. They even disabled FaceTime on my phone. I felt ashamed. I felt like a stranger in my own body.

But then... something beautiful happened.

My friends came to visit me.

And they didn't treat me any differently. To them, I was still Avery. Just Avery. And that changed everything.

That was the day I decided—I will be okay. I will accept what happened. And I will fight to make sure it doesn't happen to another child.

Since then, my mom and I have practically lived at The Nationwide Children's Hospital But through every needle, every scar, every tear—I've kept pushing. I've kept smiling. I've kept going.

One night, I asked my mom, "Why did this happen to me? How long will I have to look like this?"

She held me close and said, "Baby, I don't know why. But I do know it's only temporary. God has a bigger plan for you. He's using you as a vessel—and He will see us through this. I promise."

And I believe her.

Today, I stand before you—not just as a survivor, but as a fighter. As someone who believes in change. As someone who has found purpose through pain.

I want every kid out there who's gone through trauma to know: You can get back to you! You can live! You can laugh! You most definitely can dream again!

I am living proof!

The fight for Avery's Law gives me hope—hope that what happened to me will spark change. That dog owners will be held accountable. That victims won't be left alone in the dark.

In closing, I ask you—please, be responsible. Be cautious. Think about the children, the elderly, and the strangers whom your dogs don't know, but may encounter. Think about the damage that can be done in an instant.

Thank you for letting me share my story.

Thank you for giving light to the darkest day of my life.

And thank you—for being part of something bigger than me!

Drew Speaks:

Good morning, and thank you for allowing me to speak today.

My name is Drew Russell, and I am the mother of Avery Russell.

I want to begin by expressing my deepest gratitude to the people who stood between my daughter and death—starting with the “the power washer” Kevin Messenger who courageously used what he had in that moment to fight those dogs off Avery until help arrived. To the Reynoldsburg Police Department, especially Officer Scott Manny, the first on the scene—you were Avery’s first light in the darkness. To Mick Pfaff and the Truro Fire Department, your care has extended far beyond that day, and we are forever thankful.

To our family, friends, and supermoms who have given endless love, encouragement, and support. Wouldn’t have gotten through this last year without all of you!

To the angels at Nationwide Children’s Hospital—the doctors, nurses, trauma surgeons, therapists, and every staff member—you have mended not just Avery’s body but parts of our hearts. You became our second home, our safe place, our healing ground.

To Attorney Bill Patmon and his family—you’ve been a Godsend to Us and a rock for our family.

To América Andrade and Chris Shook, thank you for igniting this movement through Avery’s Law in the City of Reynoldsburg. And now, to State Representatives Kevin Miller, Merideth Lawson-Rowe, and Cecil Thomas—thank you for bringing Avery’s Law to the State of Ohio. You have taken a mother’s worst nightmare and transformed it into a platform for justice.

Avery’s Law is necessary. It eliminates the shameful “two free kills” loophole—something that should have never existed in the first place. It increases penalties. It enforces accountability. It takes away the ability to weaponize these animals. And most importantly, it protects human lives—especially the lives of children.

This is not a partisan issue. These dogs do not care if you are Republican or Democrat. They do not care about your race, your neighborhood, or your politics.

Ask Eva, who was on a bike ride in a rural town.

Ask Oscar, who was playing in his own yard.

Ask Amirel, just four years old, attacked while playing at a family friend’s house.

And I wish... I so deeply wish we could ask Joanna, who was simply putting scarecrows in her garden—but didn’t survive to tell her story.

These are not just names. These are lives—forever altered or tragically ended.

My daughter, Avery, survived... but the cost was unimaginable. The attack left her disfigured and without ears. Her journey is long and ongoing. Her light will never dim.

This past year has been the hardest of my life. I had to resign from my job. I closed my business. I became a full-time caregiver for my child. I became her nurse, her advocate, her protector, her strength when she had none left.

Never in my worst fears did I imagine standing here.

But God has been with us every step of the way. In our tears, in our doubt, in the moments I whispered to Him, "Why?"—He answered with purpose. He gave Avery a voice. And through Avery's Law, He is turning our deepest pain into a path for justice.

As we approach the one-year anniversary of Avery's attack, we don't mourn—we celebrate. We celebrate what's been done. We celebrate the lives that will be saved. We celebrate the courage of a little girl who now knows her suffering was not in vain.

But our fight isn't over.

As summer begins and school lets out, I plead with everyone: Be responsible. Be vigilant. Keep your pets secured. Think about the children walking to the park, the grandparents in their gardens, the neighbors passing by.

Let's do everything we can to prevent another Avery. Another Joanna. Another name we add to a list that should never have existed.

Thank you for hearing us.

Thank you for giving light to our darkest day.

Thank you for fighting with us—for justice, for safety, and for every voice still waiting to be heard.