

My name is Charles "Chip" Jenkins and my son, Alex, died of a drug overdose in 2015.

Alex was 26 years old.

He grew up in Medina County where we still live and he was a typical boy growing up who was very active. In elementary school, he had perfect attendance 4 out of 6 years. Alex played baseball for 12 years. He was a talented trumpet player and taught himself to play guitar. He loved music and was also a talented artist. He cared deeply about people that he loved, he would do anything to help a friend or a stranger. He became a beautiful, handsome young man.

At some point, he got into drugs. Alex was a good person who suffered from addiction. My son was sick. I believe it was his overwhelming anxiety that led to his addiction.

Alex was not a criminal, but he was arrested and convicted of a felony for drug possession, and the felony conviction made it extremely difficult for him to find meaningful work.

Alex could not get a job at the dollar store.

Alex was trying to stop. He wanted to stop using drugs. He hated what he had become.

Alex spent time in inpatient care outside of Medina County because there were no treatment options in 2015 near our home.

He was in the Glenbeigh Treatment Center in Rock Creek receiving treatment and one night he called me. Alex was very upset. He felt he was on the path to recovery, but the insurance wouldn't cover any more of his stay.

People with addiction suffer relapses, but once Alex got into a better place where he was able to function normally, he couldn't get a job because of his felony conviction.

Alex was clean for two years when he relapsed and we think he died from an overdose because his tolerance for drugs was so much lower because he had been clean.

Our daughter Kierstin set up a memorial site for her brother Alex right after he died to raise money for a treatment center in Medina County because Alex often had to travel an hour and a half away and be put on a waiting list for treatment.

I believe with all my heart that Alex would be alive today if he could have found a job, if he would have had the opportunity to turn his life around.

I have worked as a nurse in the medical field and I have worked in nursing homes and I have seen firsthand in my home and in my work how drug addiction is destroying lives, families and our communities.

So I'm here to thank you for working to pass Senate Bill 3.

We need to stop charging people who suffer from addiction with felonies but instead we need to get them into the treatment that they need.

I fully support reclassifying possession from a felony to a misdemeanor. I humbly ask that you consider allowing people with prior felonies for drug possession the opportunity to change old felonies to misdemeanors. These people deserve to work and they deserve to live their lives to the fullest.

We know that state prison and jails are not effective at treating addiction, and we can truly stop the cycle of addiction and crime by treating this sickness as a public health issue and provide more treatment options close to home.

I also want to thank you for addressing the felony conviction issue.

People suffering from addiction like my son Alex should not be branded with a scarlet "F" and saddled with a felony for life.

We want our loved ones to be successful and the felony conviction puts up barriers to jobs, housing and educational opportunities.

I came here today because I know there are too many parents and too many people like my son Alex who are in the exact same place we were and I pray that other families never have to go through what we are going through.