

June 29, 2020

Chair Eklund, Vice Chair Manning and members of the Committee.

My name is Rick Hughes, and urge you to pass SB 3 in honor of my son Garrett who died from an opioid overdose.

The sad truth is my son's death is a crushing burden on myself and my family, but we are not alone in Ohio.

We continue to lose 14 people a day on average to overdose deaths in our state.

Here is what haunts me, keeps me awake at night, comes to me at unexpected moments throughout each and every day as random triggers remind me of the son I loved, of the son I lost.

I believe Garrett would be alive today if he would have been treated for drug addiction instead of prosecuted on a felony charge of possession.

As I hear that you are moving toward voting to pass Senate Bill 3, I have been thinking more and more about the felony collateral sanctions that Ohioans like my son face when they are convicted for simple possession.

Garrett was a typical boy growing up in Stark County. He played baseball through high school, had lots of friends and he loved riding the roller coasters at amusement parks.

Later, he struggled with addiction and his life and ours were forever changed when he was pulled over for a routine traffic violation and charged with low-level felony drug possession.

Garrett lost his driver's license, the opportunity to start college, and it became harder and harder for him to find meaningful work.

In court, the day Garrett was convicted of a felony, I cried. In my heart, I knew that while he could overcome his addiction, he would not be able to overcome a felony conviction. It was the point of no return for Garrett.

Felonies carry collateral sanctions that erect unscalable barriers to jobs, to housing, to education, but they really block out hope like dark clouds obscure the sun.

See, if someone trying to recover from addiction and rebuild their life doesn't have hope, then it truly is hopeless. These sanctions stifle, smother and kill hope because instead of building a foundation for a better future they work against recovery.

Unfortunately, if there is any plus side to my son Garrett dying, it's that he didn't have to face a lifetime of rejection.

I watched Garrett try again and again to find a good job and I used to wonder "what if he cannot support a family," and "how will he explain to his children why they have to live a life filled with

struggle and pain and poverty,” and “what if he turns his life around and has to pay forever for his teenage actions?”

When he passed, it occurred to me that Garrett would never again have to hear in stated or undeclared tones from a hiring manager that he was “worthless.”

These thoughts are almost unbearable, but I have them and I will continue to be demonized by them until the day I die.

We know people with addiction should be treated in their communities and their problems will not be addressed in our prison system.

We know their only hope is to live sober and straight one day at a time and that we must help them assimilate back into their communities with a good job and the potential for a better tomorrow.

I’m imploring you with all the humanity in my heart and yours to do the right thing now that you have the opportunity.

Please pass Senate Bill 3. Please convince your fellow senators and your colleagues in the Ohio House of Representatives to pass Senate Bill 3 so that no other parent has to consider the plus side of their child’s death.

Rick Hughes
New Franklin, Ohio