

Criminal Justice Committee

From: Rev. Wendell Brown

Re: Ohio House Bill 37 (Liv's Law)

Date: 3/19/2023

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What were you doing in the early morning hours of September 29, 2020? I would venture a guess that most of you were sleeping. My wife and I were sleeping. Bryan and Teresa Wright were sleeping too, though not for very long. Most of us would have to look back at our calendars to determine the type of day we had. Were we busy, or was it a little slower that day? Bryan and Teresa Wright will never have to search for what they did because that day was stolen from them when Benjamin Shuler, in a drunken, blacked-out stupor, veered left of center and killed their daughter Olivia. The tragedy is that this didn't have to happen.

I understand that legislation is formed to provide solutions to problems that materialize. I also understand that it takes individuals passionate about their cause for legislation to be considered, and that there are many complexities in carrying a bill from inception to completion. What I don't understand is why Ohio is forty-ninth on the list of states when it comes to punishing and preventing drunk driving. This certainly is not this committee's doing, as I know this committee is devoted to criminal justice. What I am hoping is that this committee will be dedicated to changing the law, not just in relation to House Bill 37, but in the scope of our treatment of those who show disregard for humanity and the law. I believe you need to pass Liv's Law, but I don't believe it needs to end there. Someone on this committee has got to pick up this fight! Who on this committee is committed to ensuring this never happens again? This tragedy didn't have to happen.

I wish I could say that September 29, 2020, was the end of the tragedy, but herein lies the problem with grief. That day was the beginning of an ongoing tragedy that will never find its conclusion. The grief that Bryan and Teresa feel will remain for the rest of their lives. No parent should have to bury a child, yet that is where the Wrights have found themselves. Every time they think of laughing, they will feel guilt because their child has passed. Every time they think of that night, they will wonder if they should have done or said something different. My wife and I have had many conversations with them. We have met with them and cried with them. We have hugged and prayed for them, but for the rest of their lives, a precious gift was stolen from them in a senseless act. The devastation caused by this cannot be overstated. This tragedy didn't have to happen.

Sure, there is counseling and assistance in dealing with grief, but it never can replace the emptiness they now feel with no justification and no completion in sight. It's more than that because each day is a reminder that the young lady who dedicated her life to caring for others will never be able to share that light again with the world. This was a tremendous loss to the state of Ohio because of how Liv cared for others.

I know that we cannot go back in time and change what has happened, but we can go forward in time and ensure that no one ever has to deal with this level of pain and heartache again. There are many reasons and technicalities that exist in the formulation of laws. So I am sure that there are many reasons for this bill to fail. However, if one of you will pick up this fight, or if the whole committee will dedicate yourselves to ensuring our laws punish drunk driving as they should, it is quite likely that you may very well save another family from enduring the level of pain that the Wrights have experienced. When a committee is passionate about a cause, possibilities emerge instead of limitations. Will you please look for the possibilities? If you do, this tragedy won't have to happen again!

I strongly urge this committee to pick up this fight and work to get this bill done and many more if needed to stop the atrocities of drunk driving. Please make sure that another life is not taken! With your help, this tragedy will never happen again!

Respectfully,

Rev. Wendell D. Brown