

Written Testimony of Jill E Fagan Alexander, mother of
Samuel Teancum Fagan, February 20th, 2003 - April 16th, 2023
Gabriel Braddock Fagan, July 13th, 2009 - May 9th, 2023
House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary
The Biden Border Crisis: Arizona Perspectives

May 10, 2024

Good morning, Chairman Jordan and representatives Biggs, McClintock, Bentz, Ciscomani, Crane, and other members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide one family's perspective on how the open border policies of this administration have impacted us in Arizona.

Exactly one year ago this week, I lost the second of two of my boys just three weeks apart due to the fentanyl crisis in Arizona.

My 20-year-old, Sam, had been in and out of detention since he was 14 years old, mostly for marijuana and alcohol related incidents. When he was 16, he lost two friends to overdoses, so he typically stayed away from hard drugs. But at 17, he went to prison for a little over a year for a crime he committed while he was high on meth. When he got out, he was excited about staying clean. In fact, he wouldn't even take his ADD meds because he was worried he might abuse them.

Over the next year, he worked really hard at setting up a new life. He found a girlfriend, and got a job, a car, and an apartment. He seemed to be doing really well for a while, but then it all began to fall apart. His girlfriend moved out because he started using again, and not just pot or meth; he was buying fentanyl because it was cheap, potent, and easy to find. He lost his job, and on April 6th, 2023 while he was high, he got pulled over for passing out behind the wheel. He ran from the police, crashed his car, and was eventually arrested.

On intake, Sam was honest about his drug use. Deputies also discovered he had COVID, so they put him into isolation, which, together with coming down off of fentanyl, put him at greater risk for self harm. Experiencing the effects of COVID and fentanyl withdrawal, Sam reported intense muscle and bone pain, chills, sweats, diarrhea, fever, uncontrollable shaking, nausea and vomiting...and he decided to end his life by hanging himself with his blanket in jail.

It wasn't until days later that his dad and I were notified of the incident and eventually allowed to see him while he was on life support waiting for a determination of brain death after his catastrophic brain injury from asphyxiation. Even though Sam had quite often made poor choices, he was a good person with a good heart. When he got his driver's license after getting out of prison, of his own volition, he opted to become an organ donor.

Our family honored his wish, and on April 16th, 2023, Sam was able to donate his best kidney to his cousin who was on dialysis due to pharmaceutical kidney failure and for whom our family had been

praying for months would find a kidney donor. Sam's other kidney and pancreas were gifted to an Arizona woman in her 30s; his liver went to a California man in his 40s; and his heart, by strange coincidence (or by miracle), was donated to the adopted son of my cousin's friend, who was near death due to congenital heart complications.

As my family tried to move forward from this tragic experience, we all suffered from grief to varying degrees. In the weeks that followed, we didn't always make very good choices because of the pain we were swimming in. Every time one of my kids left the house, I was sure I was going to get a call that they had died. I made them each promise to make good choices, and I prayed they would. My constant thoughts were prayers for the safety of my children.

As a family, we went to clean out Sam's apartment, and I took out all the paraphernalia I found laying around before letting the kids in. I reminded them not to break my heart by bringing anything home they shouldn't, but I let them each pick a few things of Sam's that they wanted to keep. A Dolly Parton shirt, a Village Inn baseball cap, a llama planting pot, and cups that said "A Mountain Above the Rest, Dad" were some of our newfound favorite possessions.

My 18 year old son floundered in his last semester of schooling, as did his 16 year old brother. Gabe, my 13-year-old, ended up getting suspended for forgetfully bringing one of Sam's pocket knives to school in his jacket pocket. I couldn't believe it, but I really couldn't blame him either. None of us could think straight due to the flood of grief. And my 11 year old daughter became my constant shadow, unwilling to be too far away from me for any amount of time. We were all wrapped in a fog of loss and sadness.

During the week that Gabe was suspended at home, he decided a change was in order for his schooling. He picked out some online classes and was excited about this new opportunity. As only a 13 year old can, he confidently told us of his plans to finish high school in a year and take over the world!

On Wednesday, May 3rd, just two and a half weeks after Sam's honor walk and organ donation, after complaining of not feeling well that day to his dad, Gabe was found unresponsive with no pulse or respirations and was blue in the face.

Gabe had never shown signs of drug use. I have no knowledge that he was a regular user of *any* substance. We found out later that he had a pill found at Sam's house, and we surmise that he took it that day. I think it was a fluke, and he thought it would be fun to get high on what he thought was oxy. When he told his dad he wasn't feeling well and threw up, I think he realized he was in danger and was reaching out for help. I think after he showered and said he was going to take a nap, he thought he was out of the woods. I think he thought he was going to wake up that day, and so did his dad.

But he never woke up again.

Desperate and valiant attempts were made by his dad, sheriff's officers, first responders, and medical staff to save his life, but that night we were given the news that Gabe had also suffered anoxic brain injury due to respiratory failure caused by fentanyl poisoning.

Through another nightmarish week in the ICU, we decided as a family to give the gift of life again through organ donation. I cannot describe the grief and pain we personally experienced, nor the shock of the donor network coordinators as we met, again, and made arrangements for Gabe's "gifts." Another honor walk was put together, and on May 9th, Gabe was able to impact seven lives and families by gifting his kidneys to two Arizona men in their 70s, his liver to a 15-year-old boy in California, and two of his heart valves and his corneas to others.

I never set out to be an influencer, a politician, or a firebrand for change, but the things I learned after my boys were, in essence, murdered by fentanyl dealers both shocked and angered me into action. More than 50% of the fentanyl supply for the whole United States is coming in through the Arizona border, along with who knows what else. And Gabe's pill was not unique. The DEA states that seven out of ten pills they've seized and tested have more than a lethal dose of fentanyl. The pill Gabe took that ended his life had more than **FIVE TIMES** the lethal dose!

Did my boys play a part in their own deaths? Absolutely, they made their choices. Our family will live with this for the rest of our lives. But this virtual *flood* of pills both into and through Arizona, which has dramatically worsened under the current administration, allowed my boys to make choices they may not have without the current open border crisis.

Nothing should stop our government from ending this massacre of our children and young adults through rampant, unintentional fentanyl poisoning. Nothing should stop our government from securing our border through appropriate resource provision and management. Nothing should stop our government from disincentivizing people to break our laws and bring harm to our country.

And nothing now will stop me from teaching kids that one pill one time can kill. Nothing will keep me from educating parents about the fact that Narcan at home saves lives. And nothing will deter me from trying to close the border while stiffening penalties for those producing, importing, and selling fentanyl in our country, knowing that every pill that comes into Arizona is likely a death sentence for someone's child and a cause of grief for another family like mine.

Thank you.

Jill E Fagan Alexander, BSN
Mother of 9, wife, labor nurse