

November 19, 2025

Chairman and Members of the Committee thank you for allowing me to speak today,

My name is Tina McKinney, and I am the mother of Memphis Police Officer Joseph McKinney — lovingly known as Rusty. Rusty died in the line of duty on April 12, 2024, in Memphis, Tennessee. He was just 26 years old. He was a devoted father who had just purchased wedding rings and was eager to build a life with his fiancé.

Rusty lived a lifetime that only few get. He had a large family who adored him and loved to travel. If you said you wanted to go somewhere, Rusty was ready — his eagerness was undeniable.

He was a good kid — the kind of child every parent hoped for. He lived a full life filled with an eagerness to help others that lasted his entire, far-too-short life.

Rusty was an Eagle Scout — a distinction that takes years of dedication, discipline, and service. From camping in every kind of Mid-South weather to countless hours of community service He lived the values of scouting every day, and it shaped the man he became.

Deep down he always wanted to be a police officer. When he was five or six he would dress up as an officer for Halloween and ride on his electric police motorcycle all through the yard. When he was older and looking for a career, he would chat with officers who encouraged him to join the Police Department.

It is hard to write about him..... I feel cheated and robbed of all the “what could have beens.” Rusty was loved by so many. After the news of his death, stories poured in from friends, coworkers, and strangers.

A young man shared how Rusty made him feel welcome when he started his first job, he was nervous — but Rusty took him in and made him feel part of the team, and that kindness Rusty showed him stayed with him. A coworker of mine told me her daughter received a ticket from Rusty and shared how she remembered him as kind and respectful. But the one thing everyone said — from the hundreds who attended his services — was that Rusty and our family did not deserve this tragedy.

And they were right. This wasn't just a tragedy — it was a failure of leadership and a failure of accountability.

My son was a police officer, but he was also a victim — a victim of repeat offenders (one who was a juvenile) and a victim of failed policies and failed leaders.

God gives us life, but He doesn't promise how long it will last or how good it will be. Instead, He gives each of us choices — choices that shape the life we live. Rusty chose service, compassion, and integrity. Those two criminals repeatedly chose violence and a life of crime.

Those young men were out on bond despite being arrested just weeks earlier for serious crimes. They are responsible for my son's death through their actions and by the choices they made.

Dangerous repeat offenders are not isolated incidents for The City of Memphis. It is the result of years of political neglect, soft-on-crime policies, and a justice system that has prioritizes leniency over accountability. Judges release high-risk offenders and District Attorneys start pilot programs to identify cases to downgrade to misdemeanors.

Mismanagement and long delays with issuing car tags made it impossible for officers to enforce basic traffic laws, contributing to a breakdown in public safety.

Memphis has been losing officers — not just to violence, but to attrition. They've faced reduced pay, loss of benefits, and a lack of support from city leadership. The Memphis Police Department has struggled to retain talent while crime surged. And while our leaders debate referendums and engage in political optics, families like mine pay the ultimate price.

Public officials entrusted with leadership have repeatedly failed to uphold the standards of their positions, raising serious concerns about judgment and accountability. Some proposed defunding law enforcement and introduced proposals to cut the police budgets. Those proposals were widely criticized and rightly rejected.

The School Board has mismanaged children's futures in Memphis! Former Memphis-Shelby County school superintendent Dr. Feagins stated, "Many members of the board chose chaos over children." And I believe this statement to be true.

Student performance is beyond poor! Our school system ranks in the bottom 50% statewide. Students lack basic math and reading skills. Despite spending exorbitant amounts of money per student, the district has failed to deliver results. Millions in state and federal funds have been spent, yet proficiency in some areas has dropped to as low as 5%. Instead of investing in proven solutions, the board has spent millions on studies and administrative overhead.

Educational failures are not separate from the rise in crime — they are deeply connected. A weak education system feeds weak communities, and weak communities suffer the consequences of crime and strain police.

Accountability must be more than a word — it must be a standard. It must apply to individuals who commit violent acts, and to the leaders whose decisions enable those acts. Without accountability, justice is incomplete, and safety is compromised.

Police officers take the job knowing that the worst may happen, but it is up to those in the position of power to protect them — to ensure they have the best environment to work in, and to know that the system will work together to make a safe place for **all to call home**.

My son went to work, as do all officers, with a sense of hope and optimism that they can make a difference and the hope of coming home to the families who love them.

I urge you to listen to the voices of grieving families like mine. Rusty deserved better! Memphis deserves better!

Rusty's had a job with M.P.D. but he was so much more to everyone in his personal life. We all lost so much when he was taken from us....

My son died. He gave his life serving a city that, tragically, did not protect him in return - by continually allowing repeat offenders to be released to commit more crimes.

Crime has taken a toll on me. I would not travel to Memphis unless it was necessary, and many individuals felt the same. But with the increased State Troopers and Federal agencies embedded in Memphis after the death of my son, Memphis is beginning to change. People are venturing out and trying to enjoy the city again.

Rusty died a hero. He protected others even as he died. He gave his life! It is time for our leaders to protect those who remain.

Bring the National Guard and keep the federal agencies who are there involved with the City Of Memphis until criminals realize Crime doesn't pay anymore in Memphis and playtime is over!

Thank you for allowing me to speak on behalf of my son, my family, and the community.