

Mr. Chair and members of the Committee, I'm Rebecca Kiessling, mother of Caleb (forever 20) and Kyler (forever 18), as well as mother to 3 teenaged daughters. I'm also an attorney, activist, and international speaker. I testify on other types of legislation in state legislatures all over the U.S. and always dreamed of testifying at a Congressional hearing one day, but I never thought it would be on this topic. My sons Caleb and Kyler were killed on July 29, 2020 by fentanyl poisoning along with 17 year old Sophia Harris, when the fake Percocets they were given turned out to be deadly fentanyl – murder pills. My son Kyler had five times the amount in his system which would have been enough to kill.

I miss Caleb and Kyler so much!!! Life is so unfair. I remember telling them so many times as they played Call of Duty - even just days before they died - "Life isn't like a video game. You don't get another chance." We had so many good times together. I want to remember them for how they lived, not how they died. I try to remember the good times and positive things and I like to share stories of happy memories. But I've been asked to testify since the story of their deaths actually made national news, with three young people being killed at once. So here I am sharing the most painful story, retelling how they died in order that other lives may be saved and other moms, dads and their many friends may be spared the pain of such a senseless slaughter.

The year Caleb was born – 2000, there were approximately 20,000 drug-related deaths in the U.S. The year they died – 2020, there were over 100,000. And according to the CDC, "in 2021, 106,699 drug overdose deaths occurred." The problem I have with that statement, that phrase "drug overdose", is that my 2 sons didn't die from overdosing on the drug they thought they had. They didn't die from an overdose of Percocets. "A drug overdose is taking too much of a substance, whether it's prescription, over-the-counter, legal, or illegal." As with most drug deaths now, my sons died from fentanyl poisoning, which is an extremely important distinction. The death rates have skyrocketed not because people are taking too much of their "drug of choice," though of course some do. Instead what's happening with the drug epidemic is that the substances are not what they think they're getting and the drug dealers are giving them fake pills with deadly fentanyl, or fentanyl added to cocaine, heroine, meth, Marijuana, and even planted in their drinks. It's put in every drug available on the streets. And, as we've seen in numerous news reports, it's even being hidden in candies such as Skittles, Nerds and Sweettarts, coined "rainbow fentanyl" which has been seized in more than two dozen states.

China and the Mexican cartels are not trying to create drug addicts – they trying and succeeding at killing off our people – primarily young men. If we were in a traditional war with over 100,000 dying each year from guns and bombs, our citizenry would be demanding that Congress and the President put an end to the war. But because too many people see children like Caleb and Kyler as "drug addicts", ending this war is not made the top mission. One pill can kill – that's the name of a campaign to raise awareness because it's often a first time experimenting with drugs that a child dies from fentanyl. In many drug seizures, 3 out of 5 pills had a lethal dose of fentanyl.

Since 1999, drug deaths have increased 450%, primarily because of fentanyl poisoning. The world is a different place now... According to the CDC, the rate of drug deaths involving synthetic opioids other than methadone – meaning fentanyl - increased 22% between 2020 and 2021. One death from fentanyl coming over the border should be enough to sound the alarm, yet, it's just getting worse.

Almost two months after their deaths, I received their autopsy reports. I tried avoid seeing certain things by scanning down for the toxicology reports, but unfortunately I read some very disturbing items. Would

you want to read how much your child's brain weighed? That's the further horror a mom goes through because fentanyl freely flows across our borders and into suburbia, killing our children. As far as toxicology - both had fentanyl in them. Kyler had 11 ng/mL (ng = nanograms) of fentanyl in his blood and Caleb had 2.7 ng/mL. I'm told that 2.0 is enough to kill. Both had pulmonary edema - excess fluid in the lungs - which is what fentanyl does. My boys suffocated from fentanyl toxicity. And yet, inexplicably, both autopsy reports concluded, "cause of death: drug abuse. Manner of death: undeterminable." In the many Facebook support groups I'm in made of thousands, other parents who've lost their children have said their reports indicate cause of death to be drug toxicity, or fentanyl toxicity. They got an accurate scientific report, but in my county, they make a value judgment – drug abuse. Why is the Oakland County Medical Examiner's office making this kind of non-scientific conclusion? How many of these fentanyl deaths are even being accurately reported? I called and was mocked – “You don't like it? What are you going to do about it? You want me to sugarcoat it? Your sons wouldn't have died if they weren't abusing drugs.” No, they wouldn't have died just a few years earlier because fentanyl wasn't being hidden in drugs.

This is the prejudice which exists and I believe the reason so many are still dying every day. I've actually had strangers come to my Facebook page to say that it was my sons' choice – that they wouldn't have died if they weren't doing drugs, and others telling me that drug use SHOULD be a choice for anyone to make. But you can't be pro-choice when it comes to drugs, when life is at stake. Any addiction is an illness and we need to protect people when they are most vulnerable to exploitation and death.

My sons wanted to be free and to live their lives healthy. Kyler graduated high school the day before they died, and the day after their deaths, we found a paper on which Kyler wrote out these goals just weeks before his death:

- "1. Stay away from drugs and alcohol. It's not worth it.
2. Surround myself with good influence people.
3. Stay away from nicotine.
4. Treat people with more respect. Don't burn bridges.
5. Find another method to cope that works for me.
6. Get closer with Jaden (his girlfriend.)
7. Start doing something physical to get in shape.
8. Start working a lot to stay focused.
9. Finish school!!
10. Have a better relationship with my parents.
11. Do anything and everything to better myself and my health.
12. Listen when told to do something.
13. Don't f--- up probio or I'll have a felony on my record!!

14. Report to any and every drug test.
15. Don't follow in my birth mom's footsteps. (He loved her dearly though ❤️)
16. Be there for my brother, my only blood brother.
17. I can do anything that I put my mind and effort into.

Learn from this experience and never never come back. This is not the lifestyle I want."

We also found Caleb's testimony he'd written out weeks earlier, because he wanted to begin speaking in schools, to tell kids why not to try drugs. Here are some excerpts, so he essentially has the opportunity to testify here in Congress from the grave:

"My name is Caleb Kiessling. I'm 20 years old. I've dabbled in more drugs than I have fingers, ranging from weed all the way up to cocaine. I've never touched crack, meth or heroine as I have grown up watching my Birthmother ruin her life and watch all of her friends pass away from heroin overdoses, and also I've grown up hearing how destructive those three substances are so I've stayed away from them and do not see myself ever trying them.

My drug use stems more from dealing with a lot of mental and emotional pain on a daily basis rather than from addiction in the classic sense of the word. I have chronic anxiety and depression which comes about for seemingly no apparent reason and can be almost crippling some days, leaving me emotionally unable to force myself out of bed. I started dealing with these issues around 13 years old.

I was an athlete (I played soccer from a young age all the way up until my Junior year of high school when I tore my ACL,) I got all A's in school, was student council president, and ended up graduating EARLY, and, I've held a full-time job since I was 16 years old.

I am extremely intelligent. I have my parents to thank for that as they stressed I keep my nose in a book, teaching me that knowledge is true power and is the one thing nobody can ever take from you. Try me on just about any subject and I will at least have a limited knowledge on it.

Before I got caught, I had already realized that my life needed a change and I had been in the process of signing on with the Navy. I scored in the 90th percentile on the PICAT test. I have too many routes available to me not to succeed so even if the military isn't my path I'm gonna have a good future. I can feel that in my bones.

I'm built to succeed and my issues have only made me stronger. My shortcomings don't even begin to define who I am and don't even begin to speak to what I've been through and overcame.

I can only claim just a little credit for it because it is by the Lord's grace and protection that I am alive and here to tell my story. He has watched over my whole life, even when I refused to accept his presence and existence.

If I had to describe myself and the person I am, I'm very balanced in knowledge whether it be book, street or life wisdom. I'm a hard worker and have no issues making money. I'm the most loyal of the loyal. I'm there for my family and friends; I have never turned my back. I'm very trustworthy. My people can come to me with anything, no matter what it is. I'm the young lion of my pride, the young wolf of my pack in a sense. I'm quiet and serious but can get goofy in my element.

I'm very respectful of other people and treat everyone with dignity. I'm not violent by nature but will go to war if you push me and mine.

I am by no means impressionable and will not just believe anything I am told. I have a way of reading a person and can smell b.s. a mile away. I keep my circles small. All the friends I keep I consider family and know I can trust them even with the heaviest of things.

I am by no means perfect. I have my issues which I will never deny. But I also do not regret my issues or my shortcomings as I have learned and become stronger for them.

The Lord has blessed me with the qualities of a great man and despite the obstacles I have faced, I am well on my way to becoming just that."

My son thought he was safe by taking pills. He didn't want to die. He was murdered by fentanyl. Please don't let my boys' deaths be in vain. I hope hearing from them helps to humanize the massive losses from our border crisis.