

Good Morning, All. It is an honor to be here this morning. Thank you for the opportunity. The topic being presented is one that is close to my heart. My name is Gail Smith. I have been invited here to share from personal experience how the opioid crisis has affected my family and why I, my family and friends are so very passionate about change.

I think it will be helpful for you to know a little bit about my background. I've lived in Mount Laurel, NJ in Burlington County for the past 18 years. It's a nice town with good schools and community events. I have been married for 28 years to my husband, Chris. We have two children, Jessica and Kenny. While my children were young, I was a stay-at-home mom. During that time, I finished my master's degree in counseling and then began working as a professional counselor in a private practice. As a family, we enjoyed time together. We went on vacations. Celebrated holidays and birthdays. We attended church and practiced our faith. We taught our kids to be good citizens who respect themselves and others. We taught them to be active in school, sports and hobbies. We taught them about God.

In 2010, Kenny was a freshman playing high school football when he was mistreated by a coach (which is a story for another time). Kenny's drive for school and extracurricular activities faded away and his curiosity with alcohol and marijuana began. From 2010 to 2016, Kenny's curiosity morphed into a full-fledged heroin addiction. Six years is a long time to watch your sweet, blue-eyed boy become a different person. During that time, my husband and I did everything we could to get Kenny to the point that he was willing to accept help. That time finally arrived in May of 2016.

Kenny decided that he would leave for treatment the day after Mother's Day. At the time I thought "What could be a better Mother's Day gift? My son is going to get the help he needs. I'm going to get my son back. My husband's going to get his little buddy back. And his sister will get the brother she adores back." Little did I know, it was going to be the last time we saw Kenny alive.

At the time we had good insurance and since Kenny was 20 years old he was still covered by it. I did some research and had him approved at a reputable treatment facility called Palm Partner's in Delray Beach, Florida where Kenny detoxed and spent a few days in residential treatment. However, he relapsed and was moved to another treatment facility. A pattern of being shuffled around and moved to different facilities continued until his death.

During the *four* months that Kenny was in Florida for "treatment" he was in *six* different "treatment facilities". The last one was "The Millennium Treatment Group" in Lake Worth. We now know that this treatment group practiced patient brokering. Kenny ended up in one of Bradley Vercosa's "sober-living homes". Vercosa was recently arrested for patient brokering. It was in one of his houses that Kenny died from a mix of heroin/fentanyl and carfentanil, just three weeks after his 21st birthday on August 16th, 2016.

Kenny got trapped in the "web" of a treatment center and sober-living house scam. We are devastated by the loss of our precious Kenny. We are angry at the unscrupulous and criminal behaviors of individuals that prey on vulnerable people. We are frustrated that we were not privy (because of HIPPA laws) to know where our son was being placed for "treatment".

That needs to change. My son was young enough to be covered under his parents' insurance, but supposedly old enough to know how to navigate his own treatment all alone. This

is wrong on so many levels, but it is *especially* wrong for a young person in addiction treatment. We have evidence that the brain is not fully developed until an individual reaches the age of 25. Now consider a not-fully-developed brain coupled with substance abuse. Can't you imagine that this individual may need help in making responsible, clear-minded decisions about his treatment options? I believe Kenny most definitely needed that help. The web that Kenny got trapped in just told him what to do and he signed. We only learned that he had been transferred to the next center when he had a working phone and opportunity to call us.

That's a broken process. We need to change laws that hinder communication to parents. It *needs* to be that if a young person is on his parents' insurance and is seeking treatment for active addiction, the insurance carrier (usually a parent) *must* be notified and, if willing, involved in the process.

Thank you for your time. I am willing to answer any questions that you may have. At Kenny's funeral, we made a commitment to fight the opioid epidemic and I'm here today because I Am Standing Up for Kenny!