

April 23, 2018

The Honorable Greg Walden
Chairman
Energy and Commerce Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Frank Pallone, Jr.
Ranking Member
Energy and Commerce Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Walden and Ranking Member Pallone:

Joshua Atkins, my only child, had just turned 31 years old in November of 2017. He was a multifaceted man with many interests. His first love and lifelong passion was BMX biking, and it was like his third leg since he was in second grade. He was also an avid photographer, musician and outdoor sports enthusiast. Anything he was interested in, he went for it. He played the banjo, guitar and mandolin, and had just started learning the violin and flute.

Joshua had a heart of gold. He was one of the most generous people you could ever meet. One time he drove from his house to mine and back—a six and a half hour trip each way—just to cut my lawn.

He was the picture of health, eating organic food and getting out to exercise all the time. If he didn't have a BMX bike under his butt, then he had a snowboard under his feet. He also went skateboarding, rock climbing, fishing and did yoga and archery. He embraced life and truly lived it to the fullest.

Joshua had lived in Louisville, KY for years and was planning his next adventure—a move to the northwest. But before his move, he came to stay and visit with me for a few months. It was truly wonderful to get to spend that time with him.

It all ended on February 12, 2018. When I came home from work, I found Joshua slumped over. He was already gone. Nearby was a can of paint stripper that he had been using to refinish the fork of his BMX bike.

I learned later that this type of paint stripper, which you can pick up at just about any hardware store, contained a dangerous chemical called methylene chloride. I learned that methylene chloride fumes can make a person pass out and die within minutes—even someone as healthy as Joshua.

I learned that family after family across the country had lost loved ones to this chemical. I learned that the Environmental Protection Agency had proposed banning it in paint strippers but hadn't followed through. I learned that advocacy organizations had urged top retailers to stop selling this deadly chemical but they had refused.

It's impossible for me to describe my anguish and heartache, or how the loss of my son has shattered my heart and changed my life forever. Joshua and I were like peanut butter and jelly—we were just meant to be a part of each other's lives. I would do anything for him and he was there for me the minute I needed him.

Not one more mother should go through what I've been going through. The Environmental Protection Agency should protect Americans from this dangerous chemical and ban it in paint strippers. Retailers should protect their customers and stop selling these products. Manufacturers should stop making them. My son shouldn't have died this way and no one else should lose a loved one to these deadly products.

Respectfully,
Lauren Atkins
South Connellsville, PA