

## **Becky Savage Testimony**

Thank you Senators, for inviting me to speak with you today and for allowing me to share our family's story of loss in the hopes of helping others. I am a wife, a nurse and a mother of four boys. Our family is just like a lot of other families including yours, we like to spend time together, laugh together and dream about the future. On June 14, 2015 our family changed forever, that is the day that our two older sons were pronounced dead of an accidental alcohol/opioid overdose. Our sons Nick and Jack were like many other 18 and 19 year olds. They were athletes, had a great circle of friends, and had dreams and aspirations in life. Nick had just finished his freshman year at Indiana University and Jack had just graduated high school and was heading into his first year at Ball State University. They were best friends.

Nick and Jack had attended graduation parties the night before, came home (at curfew) and checked in with me. I went to bed as they headed to the kitchen to make a snack. The next morning, I went to Jack's room and found him unresponsive. I did what I was trained to do and initiated CPR after I called 911. I yelled for Nick to come help me but he never came. You see, Nick was sleeping in the basement with friends and when I called for help his friends heard me and tried to awaken him but he had passed away as well.

How could two boys who have always seemed to make good decisions in life make a choice that would ultimately cost them their life? My husband and I don't understand. How could this happen? How did someone's prescription end up in the pocket of a teenager at a graduation party? Why wouldn't they just say no? We may never know the answers to all these questions, but what we do know is that bringing awareness to this issue could save a life. Our kids were talked to about drugs and underage drinking and knew that it was wrong. So why would they take a prescription that did not belong to them? Prescription drug misuse and abuse was not even on our radar 2 ½ years ago, and therefore never discussed with our children.

In the Spring of 2016 we were approached by a local coalition that was doing a Community Town Hall meeting that was being funded by SAMHSA. The topic was underage drinking. Since underage drinking contributed the poor decisions of Nick and Jack that fatal night, we agreed to participate. This marked the first time we spoke in public about losing Nick and Jack, but it began a partnership with other community advocates and lawmakers who are also looking for answers to this epidemic. Since that time, Nick and Jack's story has been told to over 20,000 students across the United States to help spread awareness of alcohol and prescription drug misuse and abuse.

Every time I tell Nick and Jack's story it takes my breath away. It still does not seem real. It would be so easy to be consumed by grief and never heard from again. OR , we could talk about what happened to us and increase awareness in hopes of helping others. This is what we have chosen to do. Nick and Jack may no longer be able to live their dreams, but by telling their story we can help others live to reach their dreams and potential in life.

We created the 525 Foundation in memory of Nick and Jack (5 was Jack's hockey number and 25 was Nicks). This foundation has allowed us to reach thousands of high school students, parents and educators. Their story makes an impact, kids listen. You can hear an a pin drop in many of the auditoriums that I speak in. If we can reach one-person every time we tell their story, then we have made a difference. The goal of our foundation is to make a significant difference in our communities. We have partnered with our police, fire departments and other local coalitions to hold pill drops to get opioids and other prescription drugs off our streets. At our last community pill drop, we collected over 500 pounds of unused or expired prescription medications! When you think that just one pill could take a life, that's a lot of lives saved. There is a need for safe disposal of medications.

We have joined drug and alcohol abuse task forces in Indiana in collaboration with doctors, community leaders and police personnel; we partnered with our local health department to expand educational programs; we are working with Indiana University's Grand Challenge to establish long term plans to combat opioid misuse and abuse in our state. One goal for our future is to expand educational curriculum to include prevention at all age levels.

There is a need for increased awareness and education related to opioids. Every week, when I talk to a new group of teenagers about our family and the dangers of prescription drug misuse and abuse, it is evident that there is a knowledge gap. There are still people in this country that are unaware of the dangers like we were 2 ½ years ago.

Time is of the essence when you look at the statistics. According to the Center for Disease Control, 115 people die every day of an opioid overdose. That means today, 115 families are going to suffer a loss like we did. Who will it be today? This story will repeat itself 115 times a day, and families will continue to be destroyed until we move forward as a nation on all levels, community, state and federal to address this crisis.

The reason I am in front of you is to impress upon you and everyone listening that this epidemic is real and it can happen to anyone! Thank you for your time and once again the opportunity to speak with you!