



December 2014-PEOPLE MAGAZINE

Regarding: **SUPPORT FOR Jason Flatt Act, Substitute SB323**

The “Silent Epidemic”/ Suicide Prevention / Awareness

To: Chairman Highland and Members of the House of Representatives Education Committee

From: Cathy Housh

Date: March 9, 2016

I would like to thank you today for allowing us to testify before you. My name is Cathy Housh and my daughter is Cady Housh and she is the reason I am here today.

On November 10th, 2014, Kansas made international news for a very, very horrific reason: TEEN SUICIDES right here in Kansas - three 16yr old girls from the same area.

I am here today because my daughter died by suicide in November 2014, The day I entered Hell and still not sure if I can find my way out. A parent that loses their child to suicide has a special kind of grief. We get to go through a sudden death, a death that was very much preventable and the guilt and whys become your normal thought process 24/7.

After my daughter’s death, I crawled out of from my rock and starting asking questions about suicide. I was shocked and angry that the numbers were so high and yet it seemed to me that very little was being done to help save our kids.

It's important to understand that four out of five teens who attempt suicide have given clear warning signs.

Overall, suicide is **the 2nd leading cause of death for our youth ages 10-24**. Kansas is higher than the national average in suicide rates. Since 1980, in ages 10-14, there has been an alarming **128% increase in suicides nationally**. **More teenagers** and young adults will die from suicide than from cancer, heart disease, AIDS, birth defects, stroke, pneumonia, influenza, and chronic lung disease **COMBINED**. **In some demographics, it is the LEADING cause of death.**

It was then I started on this mission to want to stop other families from experiencing this same Hell and make sure my daughter's short time on earth was for a purpose greater than we thought of. After much reading and investigating is when I found the Jason Flatt Act and Jason Foundation.

The Jason Foundation, Inc. is an educational organization whose sole purpose is suicide awareness and prevention. The Jason Flatt Act is our nation's most inclusive and mandatory youth suicide awareness and prevention legislation pertaining to Teachers In-Service Training. It requires educators to complete **2 hours of youth suicide prevention and awareness training annually, without a fiscal note.** The training is done through on-line certification and at **ZERO cost** for the training. When Tennessee passed this Act in 2007, (the first state to pass the act), they saw a **28.3% reduction in suicides each year for the next 3 consecutive years.**

Coincidence? It's a coincidence I would love for Kansas. There are 16 states that have passed The Jason Flatt Act and approximately 4-5 more that are looking to pass legislation this year. **Currently, Kansas is one of the few states that have *nothing* legislatively in place to mandate suicide awareness.**

Our Kansas Attorney General, Derek Schmidt, is an active Ambassador of the Jason Foundation, Inc. The Missouri AG and several other state AGs act in this capacity. In May 2013, Attorney General Schmidt's office looked at adopting the Jason Flatt Act. Members of his staff recommended that the Jason Flatt Act be mandated in our state of Kansas. Unfortunately, that did not happen at that time. We know that our teachers and staff members are in a unique position of seeing our children, 5 days per week. They already have a mandatory reporting for emotional disturbance. Receiving mandatory awareness training will help them to, without a doubt, identify these high-risk kids and refer them to get the help they need. ***They will save lives.***

The AG's office has recently submitted a Senate Concurrent Resolution for implementing the Jason Flatt Act. Kansas State Child Death Review Board has confirmed that suicide is the leading cause of death for children ages 10-17 in our state.

How many of you have experienced a suicide in your family or circle of friends? "The Silent Epidemic-Suicide." As in the 1960's with cancer and teen pregnancy, if we don't talk about it, it will go away. Guess what, NOT HAPPENING. Amazing how many have felt this horrific pain and will do so, until we stand up and stop this. We need JFA to be adopted as submitted along with our AG's resolution. Just the lives of our children are at jeopardy. These are the very sad and horrific facts.

Let me tell you a little bit about my daughter, Cady Housh. Cady was a vibrant 16-year-old when she died in 2014. She had serious gastro-intestinal (GI) issues for several years. She had been at Children's Mercy GI/Abdominal Pain Clinic off and on for the last couple of years, including inpatient. As she got older, her depression became very, very serious. Her father and I were separated. He has OCD and other mental illness, undiagnosed. He refuses to think anything is wrong with him or with Cady. The stigma...

Her junior year of high school, she spent more time with her father than with me. This was a major change as we always did everything together: trips, several-out of state soccer tournaments, etc... She started withdrawing from me and her soccer friends and other friends that had been a good influence on her. She missed 65 classes at Olathe Northwest High School

(excused by her father calling in), yet she was not seeing any doctors. All before November 8th. The school/SRO officer called me, as they were concerned with this and had been unable to reach her father. I spoke with both and said we were in a family crisis - Help us.

They suggested I contact DCF and make a report, that they could see my concern and felt it a good idea to do so. I did just that. Twenty-four hours later, it was ruled out with no investigation.

Cady had 2 arrests in 13 -14 months. The last was for shoplifting. Another warning sign of suicide I wasn't aware of. She had a moving ticket violation once when the school pulled cameras and found Cady driving recklessly out of the school parking lot causing an accident, which she drove off from. Cady and her father kept these details from me until I was notified from the court system.

At the time of her passing, Cady had heavy absenteeism, 4-Fs, and was registered with the school SRO because of her diversion and then later the shoplifting. Later I found out that she had been telling her peers that she was suicidal. After her death, neighbors cleaning her dad's home, found a number of empty liquor bottles in her room and in the entertainment room. There is heavy, graphic and disturbing graffiti on the walls in her bedroom - including suicide ideation.

Her peers were concerned about her pulling away from them and from me. Some of their parents spoke to me after the fact that they were going to report her situation to DCF, but did not. Other parents did speak to her about their concern for her and her vast change in personality - to no avail.

If the kids understood and had been educated to not keep her secret, if the school would have reported her truancy problems, if the school would have contacted me or Marillac, (which I had never heard of before) – there are a million “ifs” for me and others in contact with Cady. The point being, we all let her down.

She was a kid displaying heavy signs of high risk suicide and no one seemed to be aware until she stepped in front of that train, Sunday, November 9th, 2014 at 8pm just 2 days after Ciara Webb, same school, and same grade took her life and 13 hours before 16 year old Alyssa Hutchens from Leavenworth took her life. All three 16 year olds – juniors at their school, and all three with chronic medical problems, laid side by side in the forensic morgue while their family, friends and community mourned their deaths.

We beg you to help us **STOP** this from happening to any other family including the family of any one of you. Let's together pass JFA and the AG's resolution. You know it will save lives. ***It is the right thing to do.***

***Cady's Mom
Cathy Housh
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