

## Senate Bill 323

Proponent for the bill hearing Wednesday March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016

Good Afternoon. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to talk with you today. My name is Helen Rentz grandmother of Sara Prideaux. Sara was a student at SMS with a 4.7 GPA, a student council representative which she joined to try to make a difference. She could sing, draw, paint and play the piano. She loved making cookies for her peers at school who were having a bad day. She had lots of friends and loved baking. On July 30, 2015 she made the choice that life was not worth living and killed herself. No note was left, just lots of unanswered questions remain. What was so wrong in her life that she felt no one could fix it for her. I don't have that answer but I do know that when she left us the world lost a precious child. She showed no signs she was struggling. I would know signs because this is my third suicide I have been left to grieve. Two of my military husbands killed themselves several years ago. I am here to ask you to please pass this bill to help the remaining teenagers who are still alive and struggling. I was aware of suicide but not of how many teenagers we are losing daily nation wide. When Sara died I couldn't believe how my family was being treated by the ignorance of people about suicide. One person called my grand daughter a contagion which means a disease which would cause other people to commit suicide. My Sara would not have wanted anybody else to do what she did. But in my searching for answers over the past 7 months I find that the school districts teachers and counsellors have not been trained how to help teens that are struggling or to watch for signs of suicide. I also wonder why we are not trying to fix or at least reduce the 2nd leading cause of death among teenagers but the third leading cause for teens we raise and donate to cancer research. My daughter has been trying to make a difference in her daughters school and has been met with great resistance because a few parents don't want it talked about because they are themselves uncomfortable with talking about suicide. We are losing very intelligent teenagers to suicide. I would never had thought I would lose my grand daughter to suicide because I knew all the signs and watched for them. Voting yes to this bill will help every teenager in this state. The teachers have our children 40 hours a week which is more time then we have with our children. Since I have been telling my story I can't tell you how many adults, teenagers have asked to please keep fighting for mental health awareness. No family is immune to teen suicide. I was shocked by how many families have admitted to me that their teen was struggling but they couldn't come forward to talk about for fear of repercussions with their jobs or they were so over ran with grief they had no fight left in them to try to help. I will not stop talking or appearing before committees to try to change mental health awareness. I plan on visiting other states that are doing it right to see what ideas I can bring back to our state to help with this cause of mental health awareness. We can't improve the statistics if we don't change what we are doing. Losing a child for any reasons is devastating but losing a child to suicide is the worst because you don't always get a chance to try to fix what's wrong. Time does not make it better. In my case I lost a grand daughter and basically my daughter because everyday she wakes up is another day she would rather not be here because her only child is gone. I pray that you will pass this bill and make it mandatory for all educators to have this training. I know teachers have a demanding job but in order for me to keep my license to practice in the medical field I have to keep my skills and education up. I pay for my continuing education credits. They are not free and I spend my own time doing them. This bill will only require their time. It's free training and it will save lives. One last thing I keep hearing how mental health budgets are being cut more and more. I don't understand if health insurance companies cover diabetes why they are not mandated to provide mental health coverage for the same co-pay or hospital stay. Please pass this bill quickly and make it mandatory sooner than later. Everyday this bill is not passed we lose teenagers. I would not want you to live in my world. We owe this to these teens who are born with an illness no one wants to understand or do anything about it. Please save our future adults. Thank you for allowing me to speak. Please do the right thing here. Start the solution instead of being part of the issue. Have a nice afternoon.

Helen Rentz