

## Testimony of Sarah Colaw

To: House Committee on Judiciary  
The Honorable John Barker, Chair

Date: February 4, 2015

Re: HB 2115, aka Mija Stockman's law

Thank you, Chairman Barker and members of the committee for the opportunity to appear to testify on HB 2115 or what we call it "Mija's Law". I am speaking on behalf of her friends, school staff and her students.

I got the opportunity to speak at the sentencing trial for the driver who hit Mija. Although much of the jargon went over my head, the fact they kept referring back to was the chart of the sentencing range and how the judge was limited to what he was able to sentence because of that. This made me frustrated because there shouldn't be a limit. What the driver took away from us, does not have a limit. Each day something is being affected by the absence of Mija in her home, in the schools and in my life.

So many times I ask myself "What would Mija do?" and up to about a year ago, the answer would have been very different than the answer to that question now. She is no longer able to do the majority of the things I would want to ask her about.

Mija is my friend and my co-worker. She bounced (and yes, she literally bounced) into my classroom many years ago and we've been friends ever since. She lived life to the fullest and put her heart and soul into everything she did. It showed in her classroom, the activities she created for her students, and how she was with friends. A phone call always ended in an "I love you" and she truly meant it.

I asked some others who worked with her and had them ask her students how her absence has affected them and is still affecting them everyday. I got many "Mija" stories and each showed how incredibly special she was to each and every one of them. For example, her principal, Todd Beam who was the initial contact following the accident, said he could remember like it was yesterday. He felt it was like having a family member taken from them. The students and families still ask regularly on how she is doing. She is still very much part of their staff. The whole school has pulled together to support the Stockman family spiritually and financially. He said he felt the hardest part is coming to grips that one person's poor decision can affect a whole community and continue to affect it as time passes.

Another PE teacher stated that the students are still haunted by what happened to Mija. If a regular teacher is gone and it is not quickly explained why, some students will get upset and worry that the same thing has happened to the teacher, the same as Mrs. Stockman. The students have truly been affected. The weekends I get to stay with Mija, there are always notes and letters from students wanting her to come back to them and how very much they miss her.

As I was saying I would often ask, “what would Mija do?” for decisions on everyday things that would come up. Usually she would say, “Go for it”. Which brings me here today. I do not believe the sentence that the driver was given could justify the effects the loss of the “before December 20th Mija Stockman”. I still cherish our friendship and yes it has drastically changed. I have become a caretaker when I am with her. I make sure she still has some normalcy in her life while living in a rehab hospital. My job is to bring the world to her now, as before, we were able to enjoy it together, with no limitations.

Her life from now on will have limits due to the injuries she sustained in that accident. The driver who hit her will be out of jail before Mija will be done with rehab. I don’t believe that is fair. He will get to carry on with his life, while the students, staff and friends from McPherson will not get that opportunity with Mija due to his actions.

Through this legislation, there can be more boxes on the chart that the judge has to go by and punishment could better match the crime. Although this will not make the pain, which so many of us feel, go away, it will make a difference to the other victims of this crime and their families, co-workers and friends.

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, thank you for your kind attention and consideration. I am prepared to stand for any questions you might have.

Sarah Colaw  
S.Tr.I.V.E. Instructor  
McPherson, KS