

February 27, 2019
HB 2797: Taylor's Law

Chair – and members of the committee, I am Alayna Nest. While I am an employee of the Oregon Health Authority, I write this testimony as a private citizen.

There are unfortunately two pivotal dates from Taylor and my adult friendship that stick out in my mind, in the worst way. The afternoon of July 4, 2015 I specifically remember saying to Taylor, “why are you acting so quiet, you’re acting really weird” only to be told in private that he was on oxy. On this date I realized my new friend had what I believed to be a prescription drug “problem” and I remember feeling an extreme amount of disappointment. From that point forward, I watched Taylor make an incredible effort to get off oxy, only to be disappointed and then angry when it was obvious he was back on them. I just didn’t get it, I didn’t understand why he couldn’t just stop. It wasn’t a problem, Taylor was addicted.

Although among those we hung out with, I probably was the person who knew Taylor the least, I witnessed a lot; his willpower to stop, his visible regret, and his deterioration. Many times, we would receive phone calls from an incoherent Taylor and the following day, texts full of regret, sadness, and shame. Eventually, things were looking up and we all agreed it would be a great idea for Taylor to move into a new apartment, have a fresh start with his close friends, Jakub & Dominique Forrest – my then-boyfriend and his brother. Unfortunately, things did not go as planned and nothing prepared Jakub, Dominique, and I for the evening of January 14, 2017.

The days leading up to that night were terrible as Taylor hadn’t been acting like himself. We sat around their apartment staring at each other as his struggle screamed at us in the face. We felt paralyzed. When someone is addicted to prescription drugs and they clearly don’t want to be, it’s hard to know what to do. Something isn’t right...but do you accuse? What if you’re somehow wrong? Do you say nothing? Will they lie anyway? I remember having that very conversation with Jakub and Dominique and we decided to do something about it, we notified his parents immediately and Dominique made the choice to do some digging, finding oxy in Taylor’s desk. The boys had no choice but to confront Taylor. In the kindest, most gentle way, they explained what they had found and told him he had to move out as this was a condition of their living situation. I read those messages before they were sent, and Taylor was told we would all be there for him as he figured this out, all we wanted for him was the best, and we loved him so much.

As I sit here writing this, my eyes swell up with tears and I feel physically ill. Those next 24 hours proved to be some of the worst of our lives. Incoherent phone calls kept coming incessantly, conversations were all over the place. We notified the parents, I prayed, and after several conversations that made no sense, we didn’t pick up one last call received around 5 p.m. January 13th. Taylor was the focus of our conversation that night as we three took refuge at my parents, thinking Taylor would be at the apartment, figuring his stuff out for the move. The next day we drove back to the apartment, so Dominique could change his clothes for the night. As he got out of the car, I told Jakub to go in with him, “in case anything weird is going on in there”.

As I sat in the car waiting for Jakub to return, I heard “Alayna, Alayna...!!!” and I looked up to see Jakub screaming at me “Taylor is dead”. Sprinting into a house after hearing those words, there is nothing that could ever prepare you to see your friend, your young once thriving, handsome, hilarious, loving friend lifeless in his bedroom. Nothing can prepare you for a night of pure hell. Screams, 911 calls, pure terror. I had to watch my boyfriend pull his best friend off his bed, I stood over him as he gave Taylor’s lifeless body CPR on the floor of his bedroom, while his brother screamed in agony on the phone in the hallway. Nothing can prepare you to watch the parents of such a strong man be told the news of their child’s

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death, the mother falling out of the car in agony. Nothing can prepare you because this isn't something anyone should have to feel the need to be prepared for.

The images of that night will never leave my mind, until the day I leave this earth. Taylor's void in my life will never be filled. The distinct memory of such an awful discovery will never leave the side of my relationship with my now fiancé. If this is how his death has affected me? His parents, Brenda and Brian? His siblings, Christian, Erin, and Dani? His best friends Dominique, Devin, Keanon, Dante, and his new-found best friend, a person who he constantly told he thought of as his older brother, Jakub? The guilt I feel for not doing more, for not shouting out because "it wasn't my place", for saying "just don't pick up" regarding the phone call the night before we found him, is immeasurable. The sadness is something I try to push away. Sometimes it is too hard to pray to Taylor, because it just doesn't make sense in my head that I'm praying to someone younger than me, someone who should be thriving in a career and watching his little siblings grow up. Someone who should have been a groomsman in our wedding.

When we found out fentanyl was what took Taylor's life, it made his death that much harder to accept. Taylor knew his limits and respected them. It is my belief that in Taylor's head, this was the last time he would do these drugs. He had hit rock-bottom and I believe he planned to seek serious help effective move-out day or soon thereafter. He took those pills to fuel his addiction that he so badly didn't want to be trapped by, knowing he would move forward to another day here on this earth. But he didn't know. Taylor had no idea that he was ingesting fentanyl, it is likely he didn't even know what fentanyl was. That fact alone makes a part of me die with him and it will forever haunt me. The second I heard "fentanyl" I remember saying to Jakub, "do you know what that is?" and he didn't as at that time almost no one did. I only knew of its power due to my career in Public Health and I can't tell you how soul-crushing it feels to see paperwork cross my desk almost weekly, regarding opioid addiction, including fentanyl.

This is a deliberate act by the sellers. They are murdering their unknowing, desperate clientele. They knew what Taylor was buying and they knew he did not know what he was buying. This continues to happen to innocent Taylor's across our state. These are children! These are young adults trying to make it in this world who unbeknownst to them began taking such addictive pills in their early years for simple injuries, due to a lack of knowledge around their power. But there is knowledge now, we are all educated on the strength and harm associated with these pills – so why are there no serious repercussions to those who put them on our streets? These sellers are taking advantage of a prescription addiction epidemic, selling drugs riddled with fentanyl and killing oblivious users.

It is despicable that Taylor's death will affect us every day for the rest of our lives but the three individuals who killed him, have in one instance faced no penalty, another, a slap on the wrist, and the last will soon be walking free as though his two years served meant something. What's just as despicable is the fact that fentanyl is rampant on our streets now more-than-ever and little-to-nothing is being done about the individuals putting it out there. More children will die, more sons, brothers, friends, until drug dealers are aware that their actions will carry severe consequences. A slap on a wrist for the delivery of death is not something Oregon should stand for. I beg you to help move Taylor's Law along, spread his story, and provide justice for his family.

Sincerely,

Alayna Nest