

Thank you Chair Bynum and members of the Committee.

For the record, my name is Caroline Swearengin and I am a constituent of Representative Paul Holvey's House District 8 in Creswell. I am here to testify in support of House Bill 4110.

Five years ago my 10 month old son, AJ, died at daycare. At the time of his death, we were told that he was put down for a nap and when checked on was found unresponsive. A police investigation was opened, eventually closing months later with no criminal charges against the babysitter. We received the police report, anticipating so many answers. What we received led to glaring issues in the investigation and a new reality that it was likely our son had been murdered.

I spent countless hours trying to have my concerns heard to no avail. Feeling destroyed and defeated, my husband and I chose to move forward with our grief and stop pursuing those responsible for AJ's death. Three months later, DHS came to my house and said my son was battered prior to his death, that he had endured physical abuse during the course of his life and that homicide could not be ruled out. His criminal case was reopened by law enforcement, but was closed again months later. Still no criminal charges against the babysitter, though, this time DHS closed their case with FOUNDED allegations of abuse and neglect by the babysitter. Devastated and broken, I, again, requested those police reports.

I was denied repeatedly so I called the Sergeant who oversaw the Detectives. Weeks went by with no response. I called the non-emergency line over and over trying to get information on who to speak with. Still, nothing. Finally, the records department provided me with the Sergeant's Lieutenant's name and phone number. I called daily for months and eventually he met with me. At that meeting I voiced my concerns with the first investigation and my confusion with this reopened case. His only response to my concerns was "this isn't what you see on TV" and that they were not required to give me

AJ's case reports, but that he would notify the detective to release them. Eventually, they were finally released.

These reports showed just how lacking their investigation was and proved that my son's death was preventable. After all, another child was injured in the same daycare months before my son died. The two infants had similar injuries and that child was permanently disabled due to the abuse he endured in that home. The other child's case was never closed and those parents, STILL have not received their son's police reports. Loaded with questions, I began reaching out to the detectives again and was stonewalled.

As devastating as my experience has been, having those records and knowing what was done in the investigation was crucial to my healing process. Being pregnant with my daughter at the time of AJ's death, I constantly wondered, how can I protect her when I couldn't protect him? The police report gave me reassurance and closure in my own guilt and brought to light the terrible reality that someone that I trusted took AJ's life and that information led me to parent and live significantly different.

Those records fueled the fire to honor my son in a way I never considered without them. It empowered me to tell his story instead of hide in the shadows and get lost in the depths of my own despair at the wonderful and innocent life that we lost. Finally, they pushed me to find ways to help protect more children and families from facing my reality.

For all these reasons, I urge you to support House Bill 4110 so more families faced with tragedy and chaos has the same opportunity, but doesn't have to fight so hard for something they deserve.

Thank you.