

Good morning Chair Bowman... and committee members.

My name is Katie Morris and I am here to speak in support of HB 3643 naming October 9th Oregon Youth Suicide Awareness Day.

My daughter Mikalynn Morris was first affected by suicide January 1, 2024. She was a freshman in high school and made friends with a sophomore she had Spanish class with that fall prior. They quickly connected and seemed to have a lot in common, she would talk about her at home often.

I received a ParentSquare message that afternoon from the school letting me know of a student death. Death by suicide. I remember walking into Mikalynn's room and asking her about the message. She said that she had heard but didn't say anything because she wasn't sure it was real. She didn't want it to be real. It was and it ended up affecting her greatly.

Over the next few months we noticed Mikalynn became a little more introverted. We talked about her emotional health and ways to keep her involved. Involved with friends, school, family, activities...anything. After a month or so she was coming out of it and she seemed to be in a much better space.

She ended up with a new puppy. Our Nora Mae. It was the best thing for her. We went through the summer. We had weekend camping trips, day trips, our annual trip to Wyoming. She spent multiple days with different friends at the county fair. Our girl was back. And we could see and feel it.

Mikalynn started her Sophomore year really well. She was happy, had good classes, good teachers and again had a good group of friends. We live a block from the high school and the kids spent a fair amount of time at our house. We loved it and our son Jaxon, now a 6th grader, loved it too.

In September of 2024 a presentation was given at the high school. It was not expected by anyone but students were taken into the auditorium by groups and given a presentation on mental health. Mikalynn called me while I was at work when it was over and was flooded with emotions. I met her at home and we talked through the presentation and her feelings. She talked about her friend that had taken her life. We cried a lot. She asked why her friend would do that and said it's not fair. I agreed. We talked a lot as a family and I reached out and had conversations with her school counselor.

Throughout the next couple weeks we made progress and we were working on coming back from that negative presentation. She was making some really great memories. Mikalynn was driving in her new car that was gifted to her by her Mimi and Papa. She had the homecoming parade and football game which the whole family was at. She wasn't even too cool to come say hi to us with her friends. She made plans to drive her new car with Papa and her friends to the Newberg football game the next Friday night.

On the evening of October 8th 2024 Mikalynn was happy, she helped her dad outside and we made plans to get ingredients from grandma's house to make monster cookies the next day. It was great.

The next morning we started the day out like all the others. We all got ready for the day as we normally do. Mike (dad) left for work and then I did. The kids had a late start and again we live just blocks from the school so they would walk to school. Mike even Facetimed with Mikalynn that morning. She was laughing as she was trying to talk to him while brushing her teeth. Mikalynn's friends would meet in our driveway and walk together. I would get notification on our ring camera and be able to see them. They would hang out and laugh and talk and then walk to school. Just as they did that morning.

At almost lunchtime that day I received a message from Mikalynn that she had a stomach ache and she asked if she could come home early. I called the school to release her but let them know she would be back after lunch. This was not uncommon as she often had stomach aches.

I sent her a text a little later and said the words "how are you feeling sweetie?" I didn't get a response but I was headed home for lunch like normal. I came home, went into the house, let Nora out and then went into Mikalynn's room. That is when on October 9th 2024 I found that my daughter had taken her own life.

This day has changed my life. My families lives, her friend's lives, so many lives forever. It still feels unreal. She was a person that had an infectious personality, smile and what I carry most is her laugh.

I remember seeing on social media the next day a post by our local young life group. They had opened up their house which is just a block from the high school for any students needing support. It was a raw moment when they took out sidewalk chalk and started writing on the dark colored siding of the house. One of the very first things written by one of her friends were the letters LLM. When asked what it stood for they said "Love Like Mikalynn" It could not be more perfect. She loved everyone for who they were. She had the kindest soul and I couldn't have been more proud of her. We have since started a 501c3 called LoveLikeMikalynn. We are looking to move mountains.

Since the loss of Mikalynn I have really taken a step back to look at my priorities. I second guess any negative thoughts I feel. I think to myself what would Mikalynn think in this situation. I think to myself everyday how am I making her proud? That is all I want to do. I want her to look down and know that her mom is remembering her, missing her and loving like her.

My hope is that designating October 9th of every year will resonate and remind others that you do matter, you are loved and we want you to stay. Remind our youth that you have so many years ahead of you. I want our youth to know their words matter and their words can hurt. We have no idea what each one of us are going through so lets not forget that.

If me standing up here today can save one life I am incredibly grateful but imagine how many more we can save when this bill is passed and we can raise that much more awareness.

I appreciate you letting me be here and share my story.