

Statement of Tonda DaRe
U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee

Attacking America's Epidemic of Heroin and Prescription Drug Abuse
January 27, 2016

Chairman Grassley, Ranking Member Leahy, and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for inviting me to share my story and talk about the issue of heroin and prescription drug abuse.

My name is Tonda DaRe. I live in Carrollton, Ohio. I never dreamed that heroin addiction would personally impact my life and the life of my family. But on October 12, 2012, my beautiful daughter Holly died of an accidental heroin overdose. Holly was 21 years old. I hope that sharing Holly's story will help change the stigma of addiction and put a face to those who the victims are in this heroin epidemic.

Let me tell a little bit about Holly. Holly was very active in Speech and Drama in school. Everyone who met her (even if only once) loved her dearly and would tell you how a smile from her could change even your worst days into the best days. Like her father she had a laugh that was completely infectious! She won the Bell-Herron Idol her 8th grade year and from that point on her life was centered in music and the stage. She had no bias toward people and loved everyone no matter their race, religion or sexual orientation. She had roles (some leading) in each play and musical put on during her high school years. She was voted by her peers, her senior year, for Homecoming Court and Prom Court.

In March of 2011 she gave birth to a beautiful baby boy. That April, for her 20th birthday, Holly went out with her fiancé for the weekend and I kept the baby. I found out later that she had already made arrangements to try heroin for the first time. It was her choice. No one forced her. She was curious.

Holly used heroin for less than 4 months when we figured out what was going on. We did what any parent would do. We got her the treatment she asked for and she was clean for just over a year when outside stresses made her feel she needed to use again.

The best we can figure between timeline, friends and coroner, is that she used approximately 3-4 times in the last 2 weeks of her life and the last time she used - the heroin she was sold was 3 times more pure than she had ever had (in Stark Co, OH there were 13 deaths due to heroin overdoses within that 24 hour period). Without her knowledge she used what was a "normal" amount for her and it killed her instantly.

I, like many others, am now a soldier in a war I never knew was coming. I started Holly's Song of Hope as a place for others to join me in my fight and to provide support and understanding to the loved ones of those suffering with this disease. I fight to change the face of addiction, to bring awareness and education to those who think it could never happen to them, and to be a pawn for anyone in need who has begun this fight before me, to help them in their cause. I am a fighter and will continue to be for my husband, my other daughter, my grandson and... my angel.

Although I am honored to be here speaking to you all today, I imagine – had Holly received the services and recovery support she needed during that critical time when she was clean- I would not be standing here today. I would not be speaking about how heroin took my precious daughter.

I am glad to hear the witnesses before me testify about a comprehensive approach to this heroin epidemic. And while no piece of legislation can alone change the way we treat addiction, the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act is a strong action by Congress. This bill would expand treatment for people who are struggling. Including for mothers, like Holly. This bill also provides recovery services for people who are working to maintain their sobriety. This is critical. Addiction does not end after treatment, we must have a focus on helping people in recovery.

Thank you again for inviting me to share Holly's story with you. I ask that you please join me on my quest to have an open and honest conversation about addiction – it is the only way to win this war!