

**Thank you, Senator Grassley and Senator Durbin, for the opportunity to speak with you today.**

My name is April Helm. I'm here because my mother, Sherri Tyson, lost \$350,000 to a romance scam before her passing in 2020 while undergoing treatment for late-stage ovarian cancer. It has been a long, frustrating, and heartbreaking journey that has brought me to this moment. And before I share the details, I want to express how surreal it is that I'm sitting here today.

My dad began his career at Kansas Gas and Electric, while my mother started at Farm Bank. She loved her work. Every evening, she came home to cook us a hot meal. We'd sit around the dinner table of our modest brick ranch home, surrounded by a big backyard with a vegetable garden and fresh mint.

As my father moved up the corporate ladder, we moved around Kansas. My mother continued working, eventually becoming the Vice President of a third-party administrator for an insurance company. She was also an entrepreneur. After 25 years of marriage, when I was 19, my parents separated.

Soon after, my mom met my stepfather, John. He was a good man to me and my brother. Life was steady until he passed away from cancer in 2014. My mom remained active, thanks to support from family and friends, but she eventually longed for companionship again. In 2017, during one of my visits, she told me she was going to try online dating.

Within weeks, she sent me a photo of a man named "Gerald." I warned her to be careful and made her promise not to send anyone money. She promised. And yet, over the next few months, I watched my mother fall deeply in love. She was glowing—excited by every message, every interaction. But what we didn't realize was that she was being targeted by a sophisticated criminal network exploiting her vulnerability and her hope for connection.

In 2018, while undergoing cancer treatment, she became even more isolated—and more susceptible. One day, while I was heading to a football game, I received a text from her:

**“I gave all my money away. I have nothing. Come get me.”**

I was in shock. She had promised. But she had lost her apartment, her car—everything. I told her she could move in with me, but on one condition: she had to stop talking to the scammer. At the time, I didn’t know if these people were in the country or dangerous. She refused. She couldn’t let go of the fantasy they had sold her.

Instead, she moved in with her sister in Mobile, Alabama. When that didn’t work out, she asked me to come get her so she could start fresh in Dallas with my brother. We made a plan to move her that day. But the scammers had another plan—one of their tactics is to keep victims awake all night, exhausted and disoriented.

That morning, as they were preparing to leave, her sister—who is sitting behind me today—found her collapsed on the floor. She never made it to Dallas. I believe, with all my heart, that if it weren’t for the scam, I would have seen my mother that day.

In the early days, there was almost no information online about these scams. As someone with a background in radio news, I launched a podcast to investigate: to talk with other victims, law enforcement, and experts. I’ve interviewed people of all ages and professions who were deceived—smart people: a former CIA agent who lost \$1 million, the son of a marriage counselor, a woman married to a retired colonel, bankers, hospital administrators, investigators.

This crime isn't just happening to the elderly. It's happening to people my age and younger. A woman my age recently made national news after her scam turned her into a money mule, like many do, and she is now facing up to 62 years in prison. I even spoke to the scammers themselves. One told me directly:

**"We target Americans because you have money—and slavery."**

Many victims go to local authorities only to be told there's no crime because they "gave" the money away. Prosecutors often decline to press charges for the same reason. Victims feel abandoned—penniless, ashamed, and taxed heavily for withdrawing their retirement savings. Some even take their own lives under the weight of the despair.

Today, I serve on the board of **Advocating Against Romance Scammers (AARS)**, a national nonprofit focused on prevention, education, and advocacy. We are pushing for legislation, for tech platform accountability, and for comprehensive victim support. But we can only do so much without federal leadership.

My mother deserved better. Every victim does.

**We urgently need Congress to act**—to ensure that no more families are shattered by this cruel and complex crime.

Thank you for your time, and for hearing my mother's story.