

**Testimony of Philip G. Bauer  
Parent Advisory Board Member  
Partnership at Drugfree.org, York, Pennsylvania**

**before the**

**Subcommittee on Commerce, Manufacturing, and Trade  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
United States House of Representatives**

**“Warning: The Growing Danger of Prescription Drug Diversion”  
April 14, 2011**

**Summary of Testimony**

When prescription drugs are diverted, and used for non-medical purposes, it comes with the same consequences as that of heroin, cocaine or any other street drug. It can lead to dependence or drug addiction, and brings with it the same social impact as illicit drugs.

Of greatest concern is the toll that prescription drug abuse is taking on our young people. What motivates teens to engage in prescription drug abuse? Ultimately, their desire for get high , to self medicate, or to self regulate, and it outweighs their perception of the risks. Availability and ease of access is fueling this public health crisis.

According to The Partnership at Drugfree.org:

- 12 to 17 year olds abuse prescription drugs more than they abuse ecstasy, crack/cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine combined
- Every day, 2,500 teenagers use a prescription drug to get high for the first time.
- 60% of teens who have abused prescription painkillers did so before age 15
- There are as many new abusers age 12 to 17 of prescription drugs as there are of marijuana

The abuse of precription painkillers now cause more deaths than heroin and cocaine combined.

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Good morning Chairman Bono Mack, Ranking Member Butterfield, and members of the subcommittee. My name is Phil Bauer and I'm from York, Pennsylvania. I am here today speaking as a dad.

If you were to ask any parent what their biggest fear in life is - their worst nightmare - most would say that it would be losing a child. We are living that nightmare, and it is worse than we could ever have imagined. Our youngest son Mark died from prescription drugs. His death was preventable and avoidable, and I believe the underlying cause was ignorance – my ignorance. Of all the things I worried about as a dad, abuse of medicine wasn't among them. I just didn't think about it... and now my son is dead and there is nothing I can do about it. Unfortunately, there are many people who continue to underestimate the dangers of abusing prescription drugs and, as I know all too well, ignorance can be fatal.

On June 4, 2004, my wife Cookie and I, along with our oldest son Brian, attended the high school

graduation of our youngest son Mark. As you know, graduating from high school is a significant milestone in a young person's life. There are many emotions during that time, not only for the graduate, but for their family as well – pride, happiness, relief, fear, sadness. It is a transition in life, and some refer to it as the beginning.

The words I would use to describe our emotions at Mark's graduation are devastation, emptiness and confusion. It marked the end of our son's life. I can remember staring at the chair where Mark should have been sitting – his cap & gown draped over the back, and his diploma and yearbook laying on the seat – but Mark wasn't there.

On May 28, 2004, Mark died on what would have been his last day of high school, just one week prior to graduation. That morning, I responded to my wife's screams and went to see what was wrong. She said that she couldn't wake Mark up. Cookie called 911 and I started CPR. When emergency personnel arrived, we followed the ambulance to the hospital, were escorted to the “little room”, and then heard the words that our son was dead. We went back to see him and to say our goodbyes – and we cried on his lifeless body. For Cookie and I, life as we knew it ended that day.

In his room that morning, we found a clear plastic bag of loose pills. They weren't his, nor did they belong to anyone else in our house. There were 7 different types of pills in the bag - and 119 pills in all. When the toxicology report came back 3 months later, it was consistent with the pills found in his room. Mark died from a lethal mix of oxycodone, acetaminophen, morphine and stimulants.

Let me give you a little background of our family. When our sons were born, they became the focal point of our lives. Their mom quit work and became a stay-at-home mom. She has been a terrific mom! To me, being their dad has been the most rewarding part of my life. I was a diaper-changing,

bath giving, story-reading, “full service” dad. I took them everywhere I went and we were together constantly. Throughout the school years, our sons never came home to an empty house.

Mark was quiet and an introvert. He didn't let many people into his life; you had to bring him into yours. When people took the time to get to know him they found a wonderful, caring person. Never much for words, he had a terrific sense of humor and could make you laugh just by his expressions and mannerisms. He loved sports – especially basketball – and was an avid weightlifter from the time he was 11. In the later stages of his life, Mark was 5'9” and 175 lbs – he could dunk a basketball and bench-press 400 lbs. Besides sports, he loved his family, friends, the Outer Banks of North Carolina, puppies, Star Wars, playing video games, any Leslie Nielson movie, shopping with his mom, and making fun of his dad.

One thing we will never know is why Mark chose to take these pills. We don't know if he was abusing prescription drugs to get high...to self medicate...or to self regulate. We also don't know if he had an addiction problem that went undetected, or if this was just an opportunity that presented itself. I know now that abuse of medicine can lead to the same dependence and addiction as that of illicit drugs. They can also be lethal on the first use – especially if taken with other substances.

Unfortunately, there are still many people who under-estimate the dangers of abusing prescription drugs – they believe that abusing these medicines is safer than using illicit drugs – yet it's causing more deaths in our country than heroin and cocaine combined, and filling up our treatment centers. Based on the numbers from the CDC, on an average day in the U.S. thirty-one people will die from prescription painkillers alone – and that's not o.k.

From the motivation and inspiration that I draw from Mark's life and death, I have dedicated myself to do anything possible to raise awareness about prescription drug abuse. I have learned so much about this issue over the past several years – and have had many mentors. My journey has included forging partnerships with organizations and agencies which share my passion and commitment to combat this issue. I am pleased and grateful to have the opportunity to now serve on the Parent Advisory Board of The Partnership at Drug Free.org. - and to help promote and support their wonderful tools for parents.

I have also had many opportunities to speak on this topic at National conferences, to law enforcement, to health care professionals, to community groups and parent groups throughout Pennsylvania, and to high school students. I plan to continue these efforts as long as I am able. Abuse and misuse of prescription drugs is devastating too many families, causing crime and other social issues, filling our treatment centers, and killing too many of our children.

There is no way to tell someone what it's like to lose a child – you either know what it's like or you don't. I am committed to do anything I can do help others avoid the devastation that Cookie and I live with everyday. Today, I would like to offer my assistance to this committee - if there is anything at all that I can do to support or promote your efforts to address this public health crisis. Thank you.

