

Chairman and members of the house education committee

My name is Kennedy Gjovik and I am a mental health advocate here to testify in favor of Senate Bill 2311, but more importantly tell you why we need the original context of the bill more than ever. I am asking you today to open your eyes and see that research the next 2 years is not what is going to save and reach out to these children who are in need. We need to get these children the resources they deserve and that are going to save their lives and the original context of this bill would do that. I want to share a reality with you, you have met a child that has thought or is currently thinking about suicide. Now I want to tell you the story as to why the original context of this bill is so important.

But before we talk about what the story is, we need to know what the original context was. The original context was instruction for grades 7-12 on mental health awareness and suicide prevention. Some topics that could be talked about are how to identify warning signs, risk factors, how to identify at risk peers, and the different kinds of resources available. We can get this information to students in many ways such as 1. Having a simple conversation about mental health 2. Watch videos 3. Bringing in advocates.

Now time to tell you a story, the story I want to tell you is a story of pain and survival, but not for attention or sympathy. The story I am about to tell you is my story. But unfortunately, my story is a story many students in our state face every day. And it starts in kindergarten. We recently moved, and I was 7. I would be going to a new school with kids who all knew each other, and I was the outsider. I was the happiest kid ever, always had a smile on

my face. But soon my smile faded when the bullying started. It started out with name calling. Names like fat, ugly, loser. Little did I know that it would only get worse as I got older.

I was in 3rd grade when the cyberbullying started. I remember the first incident of cyberbullying like it was yesterday. I remember being on my tablet one night and being added into a group chat with kids from my previous school. The first message I got in the group chat was "Why don't you go kill yourself?" I had it with everything that night. I just didn't want to fight anymore. I had all the warning signs, but no one noticed. Or even if they did notice no one spoke up. After getting that message I decided I was done fighting. That night I made my first suicide attempt and was the first time I had ever harmed myself. I was only 10 when I made my first suicide attempt and unfortunately that wasn't my last. I remember feeling so alone, like I was drowning, suffocating. I felt like I had no where to turn to because when it came to the cyber bullying and the bullying in general, I was told it was 'kids being kids.'

Fast forward to 6th grade. In sixth grade the school guidance counselor from my previous school found out I was self-harming. He talked to me about it. Now, you think its common sense if you find out someone is harming themselves you would tell someone close to them about it so they could get help right? It's also legally mandated that schools notify the family or authorities if they find out a student is harming themselves, thinking about suicide, or thinking about harming others. Did that happen in my case? No, the guidance counselor did NOT tell my family or authorities. My grandma even worked at that school. No one in my family at this point knew how bad things were getting.

In grade 7 my family found out everything. How? I had an Instagram account where I shared my true feelings. I used this account because I didn't have friends at school, and I was able to connect with people who were going through the same thing as me. On this account I had shared my feelings, and the fact I was self-harming. My secret came out. My cousin found the account and texted my mom. My family now finally after 4 years found out that I was cutting.

When I was in 8th grade my best friend from out of state took his own life on September 25th, 2015. I was the last person he talked to. When he called me about 9pm the night of the 24th I knew something was wrong. He was crying and the first words out of his mouth were "Kennedy I can't do this anymore, I want to give up." I immediately went into the mode of I must get him to stay. Between calling the hotline and using all the resources I had access to I still couldn't save him. It was about 4am when he told me to go to sleep. He was calmed down, he said he wasn't going to do anything. About 4:15 I got the last message I would ever receive from him. I was in denial, I didn't want to believe it. I asked myself where I went wrong, how I could've helped better. But I couldn't save him. His suicide taught me a lot. I was 14 turning 15. I didn't know what to do, who to call, where to go, I didn't know how to handle this. And this is one of the reasons I believe we should teach the students about suicide and mental illnesses that way they have proper access to resources, and they know what to look for when it comes to their friends. If I had more info on resources and the warning signs, maybe I could've saved my friend. But that's not what happened.

Freshman year is when everything would change. The bullying was still going on. And I was battling some trauma that no one knew about. Now at my previous school we never talked

about suicide or mental health. That was a topic I knew a lot about but wasn't been taken seriously. I showed all the signs. I was just getting worse and no one noticed. I played the role of the happy girl so no one would be bothered by my problems. I wanted to show everyone I was okay. Freshman year held pain. Freshman year held multiple E.R. visits because my panic attacks were so bad that it was causing physical health problems. At school my freshman year I was pretty much bound to the resource room and office. I was going downhill, but continued to make sure everyone else was okay, no one saw what was coming next

May 5th, 2017. The day that changed my whole life. Before I talk about May 5th, 2017. I want to talk about a week before. A week before May 5th, 2017 I walked into the office and gave a letter to the school principle. That letter was a suicide note. It was my cry for help. It wasn't for attention. The principle read the letter asked what it was for. I told him my thoughts and what was in the letter. He said okay and sent me back to class. Now, did my family find out about this letter. No. They had no idea I was at rock bottom.

May 5th, 2017 started like a regular day. Name calling, panic attacks, and feelings of not wanting to be alive. I remember the first thing that a fellow classmate had said to me was "Next time you draw on yourself, draw on yourself with a razor". That phrase pushed me over the edge. Right before 2nd period I went into the bathroom and took a dangerous amount of Tylenol. I had just overdosed, and no one knew. An hour went by and I started to get scared, I realized I didn't want to die. I just wanted the pain to stop. I told a teacher and the called the ambulance. My parents got the phone call saying that I was being taken by ambulance to the hospital. I'm not supposed to be alive right now. The doctors don't know how I am alive because of the amount of Tylenol I took. May 5th, 2017 was my 7th suicide attempt. I survived,

and my life was changed forever. My sophomore year I started at Midkota High school, which was a blessing to me. If I had went to Midkota before May 5th, 2017 I would not be speaking in front of you because I would not be who I am. I would not be where I am in life.

I did not tell you this story for symoathy or attention, but to show you the importance of the original context of the bill. I am asking for you guys to please find a way to give the students the resources and help they deserve because research over the next 2 years will not save any lives in 2 years. Thank you.