

From: Deb Peterson, Lawrence, Kansas
Date: March 8, 2016
RE: Jason Flatt Act for Kansas

To the Kansas House Education Committee:

My son JESSE Peterson died October 7, 2014 at the age of 33. After 10 attempts of suicide with pills this time he succeeded by hanging. When my husband and I were on our way my son arrived there first and then his wife and their two daughters arrived before we did. Unfortunately, the police were not all there yet so my daughter-in-law and the two girls saw Jesse hanging. My granddaughters were ages eight and nine. To this day my youngest granddaughter, Tatum, cannot sleep alone in her room because of the nightmares.

I was a para at the school that my granddaughters attended. When we went back to school my granddaughters were counseled three times. They were more or less told not to talk about the suicide at school. Although some of their friends knew about it and one day I was in the hall and working with some of them and they asked me if it was true about Jesse. They didn't know how he died but were asking and I just said that he had been sad and sick. When some of the other teachers overheard me they went to the principal and I was called into the office. He told me that he did not want me talking about the suicide to anyone in his school.

There would be times when people were talking about their kids and funny things they did and were just laughing and if I happen to bring up Jessie because he had been a very funny person or talk about him in anyway like that, the teachers would either get up and walk off or everyone would just get silent and not talk at all to me. At the end of the year they no longer needed me they said and I was told they felt like I was sick.

I had lost a son and they were telling me I was sick. There was a week that I missed because I had become so depressed that I had to go to a hospital but after that I was managing. I didn't walk around upset I was working with kids.

Then that November we were having some teacher meetings and the grievance man that was in charge of a lot of the counselors was giving a talk about suicide. I called him a couple days later to tell him about my 15-year-old granddaughter who is at the high school who had stopped doing any homework and was beginning to skip school and had told me she wished she could just be with Jessie. I asked if she could have some help with the counselor and he guaranteed me they would take care of it. No one ever talk to her and these last two years she has done nothing in school other than be in trouble and her beautiful smile is now gone.

Not only is this Jason Flatt Act important for suicide awareness and prevention but it is also important for educators to know how to treat someone that has had a suicide in their family. The way I was treated and my granddaughters were treated were ridiculous.

Losing a child of any age is the hardest thing you can ever go through and you cannot even imagine what it's like if you haven't been through it. And to lose one to suicide is even worse because they chose it and you wonder what you did wrong or what you didn't see or what teachers didn't see.

The suicide rate is increasing more and more all the time. Parents and educators need to get together and educate themselves on how to help children and what to watch out for. Because once they become an adult you can't force them to get the help like you can when they are under the age of 18. I pray that you pass this bill so that it becomes a law. Yes some school districts do discuss suicide but if it's not a long they could quit talking about it if they would choose to. I pray you pass it.

Thank you very much,
Deb Peterson