

July 17th, 2020, is a day I will never forget. My husband, Max, and I had been married for just over a year, and we were overjoyed as we prepared to welcome our first child that November. We had lovingly finished setting up the nursery, reviewed parenting advice, and chosen the perfect name for our baby girl: Ava Petit.

But on that day, our world was turned upside down. I contacted my physician because something felt wrong—I suspected I might be having contractions. Shortly after that call, my water broke. We rushed to Anne Arundel Medical Center, holding onto hope that things might be okay.

When we arrived, we received the devastating news no parent should ever have to hear: Ava had a 0% chance of survival because I was only 20 weeks along.

Our nightmare had just begun. We were admitted to the hospital, knowing that the worst day of our lives was ahead of us. Compassionate nurses came by to counsel us on the next steps. We were bombarded with information and forced to make rapid, heartbreaking decisions.

We had to decide what to do with Ava's remains. Could we afford a funeral? Would we want one? Would we need grief counseling? These were unimaginable choices for grieving parents to make in such a short time.

Fortunately, my husband and I had the resources to cremate our daughter and scatter her ashes beneath a beautiful white poplar tree in our yard. We placed a simple plaque there, a lasting tribute to Ava, letting her know she was real, loved, and forever in our hearts.

But not every family is as fortunate. Every year in Maryland, over 350 families face this same devastating nightmare. Many of them are forced to make impossible decisions—decisions no parent should ever have to make—because of financial constraints.

Imagine being unable to afford the burial or cremation of your child because of unexpected expenses. Imagine not being able to access the grief counseling you so desperately need because it's simply too expensive. These parents are already enduring the most heartbreaking moment of their lives; they shouldn't have to suffer even more because they lack the financial means.

I am here today, pleading with you to pass Bill 414. This bill would provide critical financial assistance to grieving parents, ensuring they aren't burdened with making impossible choices during the worst day of their lives.

By passing Bill 414, you can make a difference for families struggling to honor their children and cope with their loss. No parent should ever have to choose between their grief and their finances. Ava's memory—and the memory of every child lost too soon—deserves better.

Thank you for your time, compassion, and commitment to supporting Maryland families. I implore you to approve this bipartisan bill.

You can help grieving Maryland families pick up the pieces after losing a child. Please support Senate Bill 408.

Sincerely,

Lauren Petit