

Mason Kearns Testimonial:

Background: On July 31, 2025, at approximately 5:30pm, Mt. Airy, Maryland experienced a torrential downpour from a late day summer storm. Mason Kearns (13 years of age) and his brother) Clay Kearns (15 years of age) were playing in the overflow water or a “flash flood” area in their yard immediately behind their apartment at Mt. Airy Apartments 201 Watersville Road Mt. Airy, Marland 21771. How I understand the incident, Mason and Clay were playing with a ball. Clay took his eyes off Mason for only a few seconds. When Clay turned around Mason disappeared under the rushing water. Clay observed Mason’s shoe floating in the stream. There was a drain that was not visibly apparent in normal weather, but on this day the powerful water flow removed debris and gravel that when Mason stepped on it, he lost his footing. The water surge carried Mason feet first to a lower storm drain that did not have a mesh cover to stop Mason from being sucked in by the rushing water. Clay tried in vain to pull Mason out, but the current and suction was too great. Mason’s body became a “plug” in the culvert opening. Clay was screaming and his mother, Erica, who was in the shower, heard Clay crying for help. Erica immediately ran from the shower to assist Mason, but she did not have the strength to save Mason. I understand that several witnesses also arrived, but no one was able to save Mason. Shortly after the incident my 83-year-old mother arrived, but there was nothing anyone could do to save Mason. It took the Mt. Airy Fire and Rescue team 45 minutes to drain the area and release Mason from the drain opening.

Personal Impact: I retired from the US Drug Enforcement Administration after 25 years in 2015 as the Regional Director for Middle East Operations. Collectively, I lived and worked in many parts of war-torn Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sudan, Egypt, and Iraq collectively over 18 years. I never thought my niece, my grandnephew and my mother would ever witness such a graphic, cruel, tragic, and traumatic end to life. Add to that Mason was only thirteen, his brother Clay held Mason by the hand as he died. They will live with memories, pain and unimaginable shatter and guilt being there for your brother, your son or your grandson and not being able to save Mason.

My request if appropriate in this testimonial is simple, but I understand the cost of the remedy will be challenging for some municipalities. Mason was a strong young man. His tragedy was random and would not have happened had there been grates placed at the opening of the culvert. I have no idea but I can only imagine this sort of calamity is not rare and it will only re-occur in the future if these storm drain covers are not properly attended. Mason’s tragic death on July 25, 2025, was completely preventable. Mason’s death was a disaster from which my family will never recover. Please spare other families from experiencing such a raw and completely avoidable death of a family member or friend.

Sincerely,

Donald C. Barnes

Adamstown, Maryland