

Mason Kearns was our grandson.

It is always tragic when a family loses a 13-year child; however, the way Mason was taken was not only tragic, it was unfathomable. He was a happy, healthy, and vibrant young boy 5'6" tall, weighing 186 pounds who was literally sucked into a 16" drainpipe. His family had just moved into the Mount Airy Apartments three months prior and didn't even realize this drain pipe existed. It was camouflaged, covered over with gravel and discarded grass clippings.

His brother Clay was with him when Mason yelled out "my foot is stuck." By the time Clay turned around Mason was gone. He ran to where his brother had been and found his hand desperately trying to pull him out. He continued pulling and yelling for help until Mason's hand just let go. Meanwhile, water is swelling up around him as his Mom, along with neighbors responding to Clay's cries for help, had to dive to reach him in their efforts to dislodge him.

The trauma this event caused Clay is indescribable. He had to be hospitalized in a psychiatric unit for over a week. Funeral arrangements couldn't even be made as we knew we could not move forward without Clay being able to say goodbye to his brother. Clay still suffers today. He is on medication and in therapy twice a week. He still has nightmares, is not doing as well in school as he previously had, and just desperately misses his brother so much.

His mother of course is also suffering trauma while trying to support Clay as best she can. She tried so hard to get Mason out but it was impossible. Mason's death was deemed "positional asphyxia" by the Medical Examiner's Office. He was so stuck it took emergency personnel over 45 minutes to extract him after the water had been drained. Of course, this event caused trauma to the first responders, many of whom will be submitting testimonials to this bill with some planning to testify in-person.

The community outreach was overwhelming. We were so grateful for this support with items such as: therapy dogs, monetary donations, cards, gift cards, etc. They were also devastated that this tragic event occurred and wondered, like us, how could it have

happened? Mason was a healthy and strong young man. Had there been grates, as there are now, he could have simply stood up and/or been pulled out. There were no grates, no signs. How did something like this never happen before? It was estimated that this drainpipe has been there for over 60 years!

It is important to know that Clay and Mason were not doing anything wrong. They were teenage boys simply playing in their front yard with a beach ball. They had no idea that a drainage pond, located uphill and adjacent to the apartments, would overflow, come down, and take Mason's life.

Please support Mason's Law. Just because it seems events like these rarely happen, that doesn't mean it won't happen again tomorrow in our town or another in the State of Maryland. Mason's death was 100% preventable. Its unimaginable that there are no laws in the books, either Federal or State of Maryland, that could have prevented this tragedy.

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