

Paula & Jerry Celentano Testimony
in Support of HB952
February 26, 2020



Alisa Marie Celentano

On December 2, 2001, at 11:58 am, our 18-year-old daughter, Alisa was pronounced dead at University of Maryland Shock Trauma Center. This was the day our worst nightmare became a reality. It was neither the beginning nor the end of our story.

Alisa was born on August 13, 1983. She was my first born and absolutely perfect in every way. She was a normal child, strong-willed and bubbly, full of smiles and a friend to everyone. She loved little kids and wanted to be a social worker. She loved the color green and frogs. She was the light of our life.

On Friday, November 30, 2001, Alisa was out with some friends. The 7 teenagers were driving in a minivan when they were hit nearly head-on when a 27-year-old man driving a full sized pickup truck crossed the center line and came into their lane. The driver of the van tried to avoid the crash by turning the van towards the right, which exposed the driver's side of the van. Alisa was sitting behind the driver. The crash was estimated at 95 mph (with combined speeds of the vehicles). All 7 young people sustained some injury. Alisa's was most severe. She had to be resuscitated at the scene.

We received a call at about 11:40pm from one of Alisa's friends that she had been in a crash and was being flown to Shock Trauma. I'm not sure how we got there, but we beat the helicopter. We waited from midnight until 4am to hear something...anything about our beautiful girl. The news was not good. We were pulled aside and told that Alisa had suffered trauma to the left side of her body. Her arm and leg were broken, she had several facial fractures and possibly a broken vertebrae. All of this seemed bad, but not fatal.....until the nurse continued. Alisa had also suffered a massive head injury. She was in a coma, unresponsive and not breathing on her own. When we asked what this all meant, the nurse looked at us and told us that she would probably die. WHAT???? I wished I hadn't asked...I wished that I could push the words back in her mouth!

And, so we waited by her side. I sang to her the songs she would remember and we never stopped telling her we loved her. For 36 hours we held her hand and stayed with her. Her friends came to the hospital in droves and her younger sister just stood there watching in shock. We all did!

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In keeping with Alisa's wishes, we donated her organs and corneas. She helped to save or improve the lives of 8 people she didn't even know. And they helped her to live on.

Our offender doesn't remember a thing. He awoke to the sounds of first responders cutting him out of his truck. He was taken to the hospital to get checked out and his blood was drawn. His BAC at 2 and ½ hours after the crash was .22. He had been coming home from a 6 hour "happy hour". And we found out that it wasn't his first! In April of that year, he had been arrested for drinking and driving, as well. He had gone to court at the end of October. His case was Stetted. Clearly, he didn't get the message. He got in his truck about a month later and killed our daughter and injured 6 others. He pled guilty and was sentenced to 10 years. 7 were immediately suspended and he ended up serving 23 months.

17 years have passed...seventeen years without our sweet girl. In December of this year, she will be gone longer than she lived. Our pain has dulled, but it will never go away. Certain things bring it back with too much clarity. A song, a holiday, an old friend, a picture. Parents should never have to bury their child!

I cannot say for sure, but I feel pretty certain that, had our offender been ordered to get the Interlock device put into his car after his first offense....the one where no one was injured, our daughter would be alive today. This legislation just makes sense. Close the gaps, close the loopholes. The only thing this device does is prevent a driver from drinking and driving. A small price to pay to save someone else's child.

Thank you,
Jerry and Paula Celentano
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