

Support

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My name is Michael McLaughlin and I live in Laurel with my wife and adult daughter.

Loss and grief are a part of life. When the loss is expected, such as after a long life well lived or an extended illness, we are more resigned to accept the loss and somewhat ready to deal with the attendant grief. Some questions may have already been answered; post-loss plans may have been made; emotions have been prepped, if not fully prepared (can they ever be?) for the loss.

When the loss is sudden or unexpected, however, there is no quasi-preparation or easing into grief. The loss hits like a heavy blow to the head and heart, and grief overwhelms as you struggle to accept an unbearable reality. Nothing make sense because you are trying to comprehend the incomprehensible.

When our 25 year-old son, Kevin, died by suicide in 2018, we were crushed by that sudden loss, and grief stricken by shock and sadness.

If you are fortunate enough to have never experienced that level of grief, you should know that it was like a thick fog had settled in on every aspect of our lives; we struggled to see, hear, think; nothing was clear because nothing made sense. It was a fog of confusion and denial, of not wanting to accept what we were forced to accept; of trying to understand but being confused and not even knowing what questions to ask to be rid of the confusion; of making decisions without informed guidance to help us decide.

The shock of Kevin's sudden death was exacerbated by the fact that our first interaction was with the Violent Crimes Division of the Howard County Police Department. We came to understand why that is, with so many suicides involving firearms, and the line between suicide and homicide being sometimes blurred. But that wasn't the case with Kevin's death. So the shock and confusion was compounded by having to interact with a homicide detective.

That detective and others with the Howard County Police Department did the best they could. They were professional, sympathetic and understanding. But they are charged with investigating, to determine the facts surrounding deaths by suicide in order to rule out homicide. I'm sure they receive training in dealing with grief-stricken families. And we will always be grateful for the gentle and understanding way they dealt with us. But they have a job to do, and attending to grief beyond those initial, traumatic interactions is not part of the job.

To the Members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee
Regarding **HB 699**
Office of the Chief Medical Examiner - Grief Counseling Services
February 16, 2022

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Our interaction with the state Office of Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) was minimal at first. Later, when I reached out to the OCME for more information surrounding Kevin's death, I ran into difficulty. Would grief counseling services have helped with that difficulty? I believe it would, by providing a liaison to facilitate better communication between families rocked by trauma and government personnel who are charged with investigating that trauma.

The grief counseling services that will be provided by HB 699 will help reduce the burden on police personnel and medical examiners at the same time it helps families see through the fog of grief as they deal with their loss.

I urge you to vote favorably for HB 699 Office of the Chief Medical Examiner - Grief Counseling Services.

Thank you,

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