

Good Afternoon Chair and members of the committee,

My name is Liz Vickers and I am a resident of Frederick County. I live on a farm in Middletown with my husband James and my 4 boys. I am here today in favor of Bill HB1274.

I am no stranger to tragedy. Almost 15 years ago, on July 25, 2010 my beautiful son Eric was tragically killed. Eric was 6 years old- a child with boundless energy, full of hopes and dreams. He had just finished his kindergarten year. He was days away from starting football practice which he was so excited about. It was a beautiful Sunday afternoon when a huge thunderstorm blew through. Eric was at a park with his father and older brother, Drew. They decided to make a quick run for it to get back home before the rain started- they were due to come home to my house that evening. Within seconds, straight line winds ripped a tree in half and it fell down on Eric, killing him instantly. When I received the call, my entire world came crashing down. In those few seconds, I watched a lifetime of hopes and dreams vanish. Graduating from elementary school, middle school, proms and awards... graduation from high school, his wedding, his children. I was left there broken with nothing but hearing his little voice in my memories.

Over the course of the next 15 years, I have had to stand strong, raising my family through grief and tragedy. It wasn't our only trial. My 6<sup>th</sup> baby- Angelia Elizabeth was born with congenital heart defects just a short 2 years after Eric died. She lived 5 months and never came home from the hospital-leaving us grieving all over again. It's certainly not been an easy journey. I am a cancer survivor and had a stress induced heart attack- all while raising a family to the best of my abilities.

This brings me to why I'm here. Education is more than just credits. It's a journey to adulthood. All parts of that journey include milestones that can sometimes be taken for granted. Watching them learn to read, scoring a touchdown on the football field, getting straight A's, prom, watching them in their school play, learn to stand up and do public speaking (ha!), science projects, field trips, friendships. When Eric (And Angelia) died, I didn't just lose them, I lost their future too. A posthumous diploma is a small way to honor those children and their journey in their lifetime, whether they were young like Eric, or in high school about to graduate. Their journey should be honored.

This bill isn't just about a piece of paper. It's about finding compassion for grieving families and offering a connection to the community in which their child grew. They deserve to be honored and not lost. Their families deserve healing. I respectfully ask that you vote in favor of this bill. Thank you.

