

HB1041 (FAV)

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Chair Bagnall and Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony **in support of HB1041** on behalf of Campaign For Camp Safety.

My name is Ryan DeWitt, father of Molly Claire DeWitt. I submit this testimony on behalf of my wife Elizabeth and Molly's older sister, Annie. Molly was one of the precious lives lost during the July 4th flood in Kerr County, Texas, along with her 26 newly minted sisters, who had formed an inseparable bond in just a weeks' time. Molly was, and still is, a bright light in this often broken world. She embodied so many amazing qualities despite her brief 9 years on earth. She squeezed more into 9 years than many will in 90. Saying Molly was larger than life is no exaggeration

Molly's relentless curiosity led to questions at all hours of the day and night, many of which I had never pondered as an adult, but probably should have. Her compassion was overflowing – always looking outside her circle to see who else she could include, who might not have as many friends. She was drawn to those on the margins – the homeless, refugees displaced by war, children with disabilities. Her generosity followed her compassion, often coming home from school and asking if we could buy things on Amazon for students that couldn't afford what we could. Her creative spirit was ever present – which she inherited from her Mom. She planned to take over Elizabeth's interior design business when she got older, while running a taco shop on the side to appease Dad's career in the food industry. Her conviction was unwavering – what others thought and felt mattered deeply to her but didn't necessarily drive her decisions. Her athleticism and drive were remarkable – a talented soccer player from an early age. She didn't understand giving less than 100% effort, 100% of the time. It didn't register as an option for her. Her faith in God was deep and unwavering, which Elizabeth and I always emphasized as important, but something that she took to another level all on her own.

Molly was radiant—stunning in a way that went far beyond appearance. Her beauty wasn't just seen; it was felt. Her expressive face told stories of joy, mischief, compassion, and light. Her vivid blue-green eyes held remarkable depth, connecting especially with those who felt unseen. She made people feel known—not just with her words, but with her

presence. Molly's beauty was most powerful because it reflected the love and empathy she carried within. Molly's presence brought joy and inspiration to everyone who knew her. She lived generously, loved deeply, and left a lasting impression on hearts far and wide. Molly was in ongoing awe of her older sister Annie, every minute of every day. Annie taught her things Elizabeth and I couldn't. Molly was her biggest fan and always will be. The joy on her face when Annie allowed her to hang out with the "older girls" can't be put into words. For Elizabeth and I, our greatest life achievement is Annie and Molly.

What has become evident over the last 8 months is that while Molly was no doubt unique in her own ways – she shared so much in common with the other 26 amazing souls. These young ladies were cut from the same cloth and were destined to lead with love and change the world. The two counselors that passed, Chloe Childress and Katherine Ferruzzo, were without a doubt, a 10 year fast forward snapshot to where our girls were headed. Loving, strongly rooted in their faith, and selfless. They will forever be heroes in our hearts.

In short, on July 4th at Camp Mystic, the world lost 27 lives that were destined to change our landscape forever, in their own unique ways. The biggest tragedy is that it never should have happened – this was 100% preventable. The cabins should never have been in a floodplain. An evacuation plan should have been established and been thorough, communicated, and practiced. Additional safeguards should have been in place. Unfortunately, none of these things met the appropriate standards.

Elizabeth and I, and the other grieving parents of Heaven's 27 are living in an unimaginable nightmare – but are also proud pillars of strength for our daughter's legacies, to ensure that what happened on July 4th, 2025 never, ever happens again. We successfully passed SB1 and HB1 (Heaven's 27 Camp Safety Act) through the Texas Senate and House, respectively, in September. I urge you to do the same in Maryland. Cabins should never reside in a flood hazard area. Taking the appropriate preventative measures to remove as much possible risk of disaster. Every camp should be held to the highest standard of safety in considering the location of their buildings and sleeping quarters.

Beyond the restriction of cabins residing in a flood hazard area, I would encourage the State of Maryland to take additional measures to safeguard their campers – including a required, effective evacuation plan that is practiced and communicated, early detection technology to warn of potential dangers, and enhanced communication of safety standards to parents of campers. Corners cannot not be cut. The lives of millions of children that will attend camps in the future depend on it. Let's continue to make our 27 daughters proud, along with scores of other children who have been witness and affected by our tragedy. The time is now. Thank you for reading.