

Testimony of Toni Pellegrini

April 21, 2010

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the House Education Committee, thank you for this opportunity to speak to you. My name is Antoinette Pellegrini, Co-founder of the Louis T. Savino, III Foundation.

On Thursday afternoon of Oct 12, 2000, I left work like any other day to pick up my son Louis at school and on the way home we discussed the 6 p.m. soccer practice. I wanted Louis to skip practice due to the many errands we needed to complete before the evening was over. As usual we compromised and went to practice ½ later because according to Louis, his team needed him. But then again, so did I.

Prior to October 12th, 2000, I would have never dreamed that my son, Louis was living with a silent killer. Louis, who took care of himself regarding his diet and exercise routine, appeared to be the picture of excellent health. Unknown to me 9 years & 11 months ago, I joined hundreds of parents throughout our country whose teenager died from sudden cardiac death. At that time, I was unaware that a child's growth spurt along with intense physical activity can hinder his or her health if there is a heart defect present that goes undetected.

I parked my car; Louis got out and told me to do some more errands. I, of course, didn't leave the field... I never did. I stayed at all practices and games— just in case. And then the worse happened— 2 of his teammates came to my car to tell me Louis collapsed. Louis' coach and several bystanders administered CPR to Louis while waiting for the ambulance. Once we arrived at the hospital, the staff placed me in a room and waited with me. One of the ER doctors came to me after sometime and said the most dreadful words a parent could hear; "Mrs. Pellegrini, Louis didn't make it." I could only look at her in disbelief and in that very moment my mind raced -this cannot be happening. WHY? HOW? He is **ONLY** 15 years old.

I live the rest of my life wondering if the field was equipped with an AED, Louis could be with us today.

Life everyday is quite different for me now and I know it can never be what it was when I shared my days with my son, Louis. Now I look to my dreams to share time with my son. My time here is spent on a crusade to spread awareness in the prevention of sudden cardiac death in memory of Louis AND to spare parents from having to experience the same ultimate tragedy of losing a child.

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I can promise you, this is not a way of life as one wishes to live it. Gone are Louis' dreams of becoming a sportscaster – gone are my dreams of seeing him succeed. When a parent loses a child, a parent loses his future.

My only resort now is to daydream as to what my son would be doing and in his memory make the public aware, educate them with the warning signs of fatal heart ailments and fight for AEDs in every school and on every sports field our children are attending.

Sometimes my mind wanders to that horrific night, even when I don't want to think of it. My mind often ponders on how could this have happened -- **with all our technology and with all our knowledge**. When we are stumbled by questions and dilemmas, we are not to take the easy way out and leave matters as they stand, we are to **take the challenge, make the changes, find the answers and save the lives**. We made the laws, we are responsible for updating them and making better laws. We must make the changes to save our children and we cannot let profit and losses get in the way. I hope we all believe that survival--saving lives--is not a business of numbers but a responsibility and all other factors should not deter from the right decision. We are responsible for our children and we must take steps that act on their behalf.

Our call to action became apparent. We were not only inspired by my son's spirit of community service to move forward with our crusade but also with the many similar stories we found. So in December 2000 we formed the Louis T. Savino III Foundation. The Foundation's mission includes educating parents, students and coaches in terms of the warning signs of potentially fatal heart ailments in young people, provide funding for automatic external defibrillators to schools and sports fields, and the screening of high school athletes for heart disorders and working for the revision and standardization of state-wide physical examination forms and procedures.

Are we not in the business of saving lives? What examples are we setting for the next generation? This is America... are we no longer leading the way. I urge you to consider my plea and listen with an open mind... because anyone of us can be affected anytime, anywhere. We are hopeful that you too will come to understand and believe we need to take action now. America must take part in the chain of survival.

Thank you for your attention.

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Louis T. Savino, III Foundation

Toni Pellegrini, of Yardley, PA is the Co-Founder and Treasurer of the Louis T. Savino, III Foundation. She is the mother of Louis T. Savino, III who died on October 12, 2000 at Macclesfield in the Bucks County, Pennsylvania suburb of Lower Makefield. Louis died at the young age of 15 during soccer practice of an undetected congenital heart condition known as hypertrophic cardiomyopathy.

Lorraine Sikora, of Newtown, PA is the Co-Founder and Board President of the Louis T. Savino, III Foundation. She is the aunt of Louis T. Savino, III.



The mission of the foundation is to make parents, coaches and student athletes aware of the warning signs of congenital heart disease and heart ailments, to press for better school physicals and health screenings for athletes and to ultimately donate automatic external defibrillators and fund the necessary life-saving training on local athletic fields.

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