

Testimony of Lorraine Sikora
April 21, 2010

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Mr. Chairman and members of the House Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

Soon after the sudden death of my 15-year old nephew Louis Savino, it was inconceivable for me to think that a young life could end so abruptly. I had seen him only days before. We chatted about his sophomore year which he had started one month prior. He was excited and looking forward to what was ahead.

Who would have guessed that four days later, my family and I would discover the painful loss that so many families have experienced in this room? On October 12, 2000, Louis collapsed from a hidden heart defect during a soccer practice -- without a chance of survival— and no Automated External Defibrillator on-site. Desperate for an answer, I began researching sudden death in youth and I was shocked by the incidence of stories. The common thread of hidden heart defects and the absence of an AED was most evident. In December, 2000 Louis' Mom and I formed a foundation in his memory with the specific mission of providing funding for AEDs in schools, camps and athletic fields. Clearly, there was a need to be met.

Reliable statistics on the number of heart-related student deaths are difficult to identify due to a lack of national standardized data. So, I began building my own registry of cases -- those stories that don't make the top news, of ordinary young people who start their day with great anticipation and never return home that evening. There are painful stories of parents, students, teachers and coaches who witnessed the sudden death of a young person---this leaves an indelible mark. By now I can almost recite the verbiage. Each story is amazingly similar as if the reporters were using one template.

Sadly, nearly ten years later, the media stories are larger than four telephone books – each page representing the life of a young person in the United States lost to sudden cardiac death. In nearly all of the cases, there was no AED was available. Our database is immense as you can imagine. When I arrive home from work each day, I comb through the search results of internet stories which average one every three days and post them on our website... there has yet to be a month where I haven't located at least five Sudden Cardiac Death cases in youth – recognizing internet searches are not all encompassing, we know this number is much higher in reality. Conversely, as AEDs have become more commonplace, I began locating articles where on-site AEDs were successfully deployed and young lives were consequently spared. Those stories are tracked on our website as well.

I would like to share my findings following nearly a decade of daily internet research. I come to you with facts, not as a medical professional, but as a layperson who has gathered information from reputable news sources. While not an officially sanctioned study, these calculations are very telling and make an important case for on-site AEDs in schools.

Having searched internet news stories from January, 2000 until March, 2010, I have located 611 sudden cardiac death cases in youth of school age. **(exhibit 1)** The prime ages for these deaths were between 14 – 17 although cases were tracked in elementary school as young as 5 years of age. **(exhibit 2)** The most common activities in which a sudden cardiac death occurred were basketball, followed by football and then during gym class. **(exhibit 3)** Still other tragedies occur during activities like casual games of pick-up basketball, jogging, and at times walking down a hall -- some events even occur when a student is seated in class.

When evaluating these cases by state, Pennsylvania had the fourth highest number of sudden cardiac deaths in youth with Ohio, Texas and California leading in numbers. **(exhibit 4)** This data represents students who had hidden heart defects. It does not include accidents that cause the heart to stop such as comotio cordis which is blunt trauma to the chest.

The analysis of AED saves has been a fascinating learning experience. From 2006 – present we have tracked 151 sudden cardiac arrest “saves” in the US using an on-site AED. **(exhibit 5)** Interestingly, one of those saves was a North Carolina State Representative – she was saved using the legislative buildings’ AED.

105 of those “saves” occurred at schools equipped with AEDs. As a result, 86 students (82%) were saved. And, 19 adults (18%) were also saved at schools -- among the adults, a school Physical Education teacher in Florida, a student’s grandmother in South Carolina, and just last month, a Principal in Indiana and a grandfather who was coaching his grandson’s basketball game in Bucks County, Pennsylvania – these two “saves” occurred in the same week. **(exhibit 6)** This demonstrates that AEDs on-site in school environments can save visitors, adults and students alike. The availability of these units along with awareness & properly trained personnel has lead to an extraordinary turn of events – lives are being saved with on-site AEDs. Clearly, being prepared is making the difference between life and death. We now know that sudden cardiac arrest does not have to result in sudden death and tragedy.

Thank you for your attention and for considering this important, potentially life saving legislation. It is certain to save the lives of the school students and those visiting schools in the State of Pennsylvania.

Exhibit 1

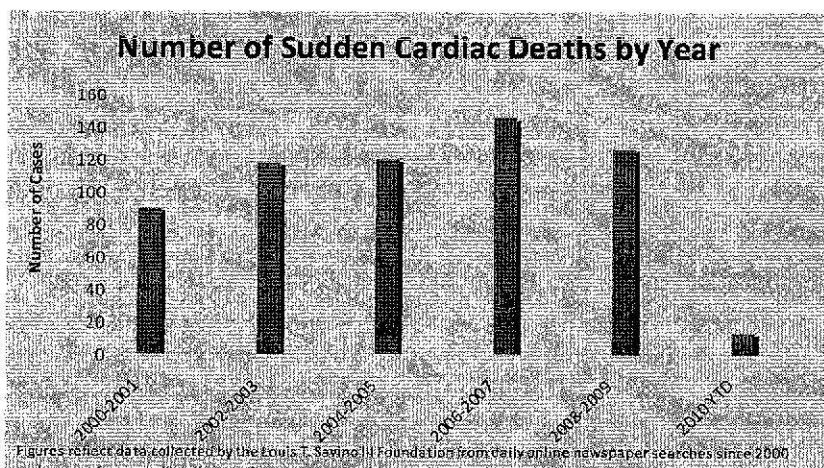


Exhibit 2

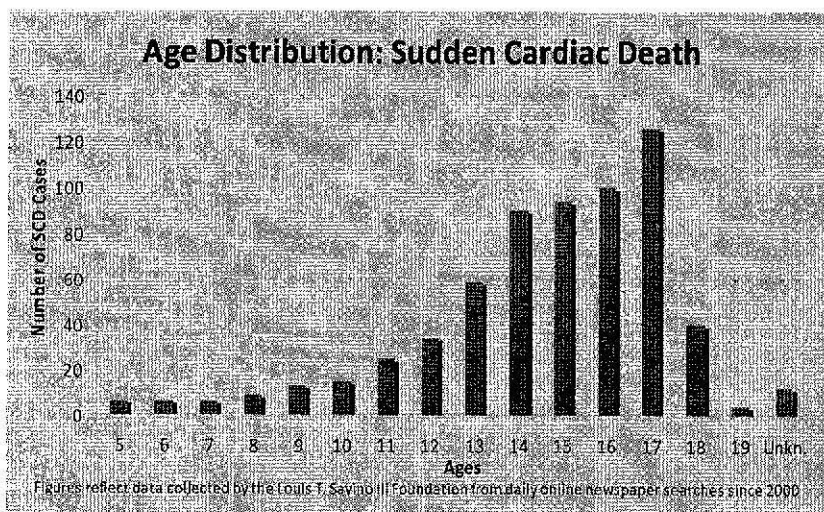
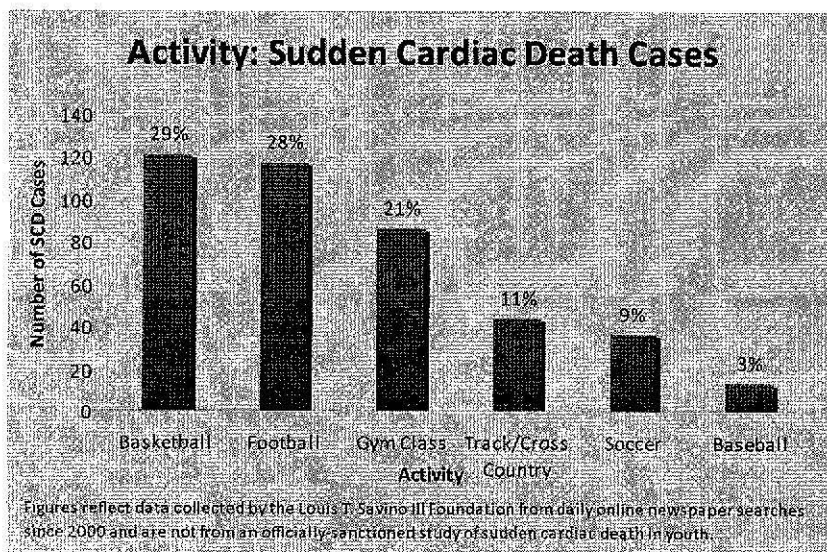


Exhibit 3



Figures reflect data collected by the Louis Savino Foundation from daily online newspaper searches since 2000. This data is not from an officially sanctioned study of sudden cardiac death in youth. Numbers represent a sampling of cases and totals are likely to be much higher than noted.

Exhibit 4

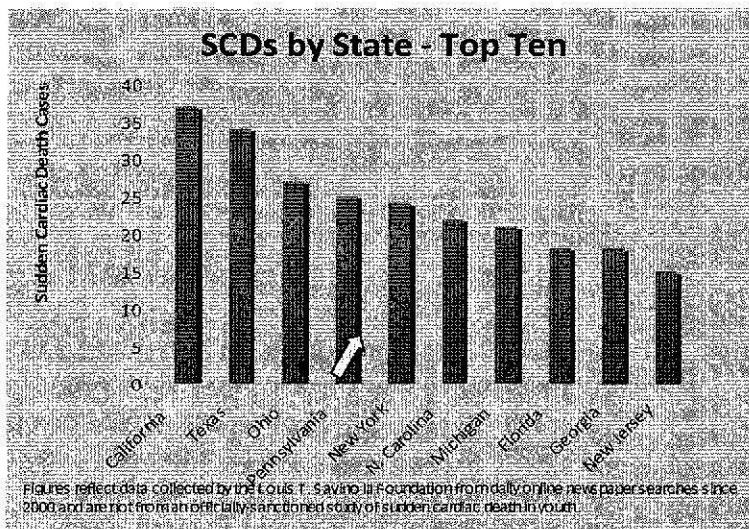


Exhibit 5

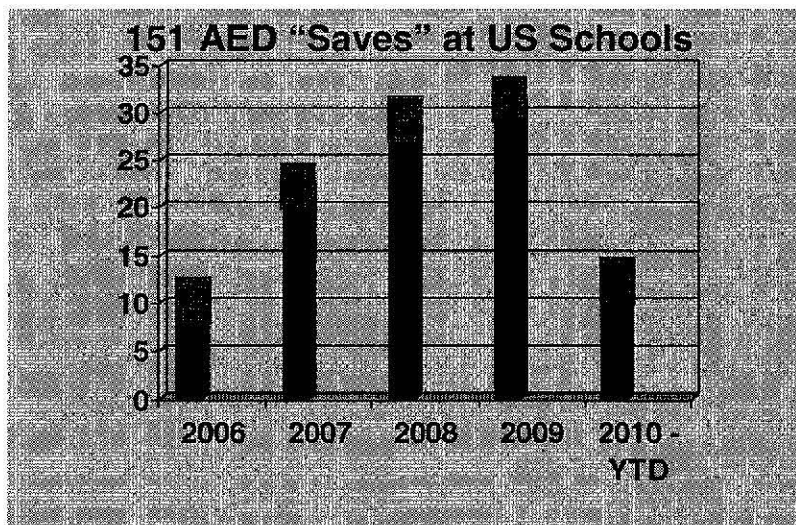
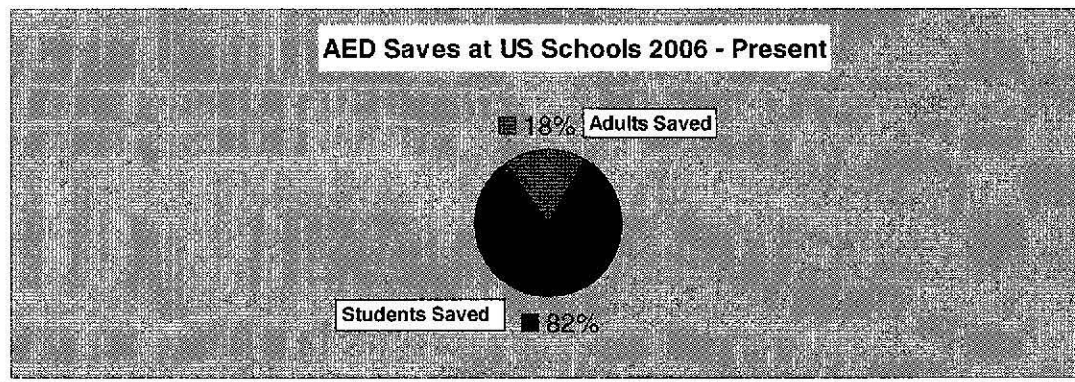


Exhibit 6



Figures reflect data collected by the Louis Savino Foundation from daily online newspaper searches since 2000. This data is not from an officially sanctioned study of sudden cardiac death in youth. Numbers represent a sampling of cases and totals are likely to be much higher than noted.

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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