

My name is **Nicole Louthain**, and I am from **Grand Forks Air Force Base**. For those who know my story, you may be asking—why am I advocating for this? *My daughter, 6 year old Katarina Louthain*, had both her parents. But I no longer have my child.

The reason I am here is because I know an extraordinary grief that most people could never fathom. I was on my way home from my daughter's drum lessons on a clear, sunny Monday—June 3rd, 2024. It was 6:30 p.m. when I stopped at a red light. A second after it turned green... my world shattered. A drunk, distracted driver smashed into us at an astronomically insulting speed—well over the 55 mph limit.

In that instant, my daughter's neck snapped. There was no trunk. No back seat. There wasn't even much of a front seat left. My brain was so bloody and shifted that no one knows how I am still walking, talking, or even alive. But I am. And I was trapped... trapped in a crumpled car while my only child died right next to me. I screamed. I fought to get to her. But I couldn't.

I don't know what it's like to lose my parents due to someone's selfish choices... but I know what it's like to lose my child. I know what it's like to witness her life stolen, to feel her presence ripped away, and to be left with nothing but haunting memories of her giggle, her love, and her future—gone.

In situations like mine, when the roles are reversed, I can only imagine a fraction of that child's pain. And that pain far outweighs the grief of a parent. A child, who loses their parents, loses the safety, stability, and love that carries them through life. A child cannot clothe themselves. A child cannot feed themselves. A child is not equipped to face the harshness of this world alone. They are merely at the mercy of a broken system that fails them over and over again.

When I was offered an insurance settlement of \$200,000, I was disgusted. That amount doesn't even begin to scrape the surface of the hundreds of thousands of dollars of medical bills—some of which are sitting in collections. But what if this had been a child left behind by a parent taken too soon? That settlement wouldn't have been enough to sustain them through childhood, let alone into adulthood. Money won't bring their parents back. But it can ensure they have a chance—a chance to survive, to grow, to thrive despite the unimaginable loss.

We are approaching a year since my daughter was killed. We have video evidence—without a shadow of a doubt—that a crime was committed and I couldn't have stopped it. And yet, her murderer walks free. I have been told, time and time again, to prepare for the worst. The worst being little to no accountability. If this is how exhausting, degrading, and painful I have to fight for justice for my child, I cannot even begin to imagine what an innocent, defenseless child would endure in the aftermath of losing their parent to someone's reckless, irreversible decisions.

I am begging you. I am pleading with you. Please, hold those who make these selfish, reckless choices accountable. Protect our children. When a parent is taken, make sure their murderer is forced to compensate the child they left behind—so they still have a chance at a future. A chance to be educated, to grow, to do better, and to not fall victim to a world that preys on vulnerable children without the protection of loving parents who would have given anything to watch them grow.

Do not let these children suffer twice—once by losing their parent and again by being abandoned by a system that refuses to fight for them. Please... I am begging you. Protect them. Hold these murderers accountable. Our children's futures depend on it.