

Chairman and members or of the Senate education committee.

I am here to testify in favor of Senate Bill 2311.

Hi, my name is Kennedy Gjovik, and I am a mental health advocate. I am here today to tell you the importance of this bill and the story behind the bill. But first what does the pertain to. In line 7 it adds the word wellness, so it says Health and Wellness curriculum. This is important because we do not want to add to the stigma that health classes and health is just about physical health because that is not true, adding the word wellness to it means we are also talking about mental health and emotional wellness which needs to be talked about more.

If you look at Section 2 lines 13 through 19 you will notice how it talks about there needs to be instruction for grades 7-12 on mental heal awareness and suicide prevention. Some topics that could be talked about are how to identify warning signs, risk factors, how to identify at risk peers, and the different kinds of resources available. We can get this information to students in many ways such as 1. Having a simple conversation about mental health 2. Watch videos 3. Bringing in advocates.

Now I want to tell you the story behind senate bill 2311. The story behind the bill is my story. I am not telling you it for sympathy or anything like that but to show you the reality many students face. And how something as simple as knowledge and instruction on mental health could save so many lives.

When I was 7, I was the happiest kid ever. I always had a smile on my face. No one would ever think my smile would hide the pain it did. When I was 7, we moved to where I currently reside. I started a new

school where everything changed. In kindergarten the bullying started. It started with name calling. Names like: fat, ugly, loser. Little did I know it would progress as I got older.

I was in 3rd grade when the cyberbullying started. I was only 10 when I made my first suicide attempt. I remember being on my tablet one night when I was added into a group chat that had kids from my previous school in it. The first message I got in the group chat was “Why don’t you go kill yourself?” I had it with everything that night. I just didn’t want to fight anymore. I had all the warning signs, but no one noticed. Or even if they did notice no one spoke up. After getting that message I decided I was done fighting. That night I made my first suicide attempt and was the first time I had ever harmed myself. When it came to the cyberbullying nothing was done about it and I was told it was just “kids being kids.”

Fast forward to 6th grade. In sixth grade the school guidance counselor from my previous school found out I was self-harming. He talked to me about it. Now, you think its common sense if you find out someone is harming themselves you would tell someone close to them about it so they could get help right? It’s also legally mandated that schools notify the family or authorities if they find out a student is harming themselves, thinking about suicide, or thinking about harming others. Did that happen in my case? No, the guidance counselor did NOT tell my family or authorities. My grandma even worked at that school. No one in my family at this point knew how bad things were getting.

In grade 7 my family found out everything. How? I had an Instagram account where I shared my true feelings. I used this account because I didn’t have friends at school, and I was able to connect with people who were going through the same thing as me. On this account I had shared my feelings, and the fact I was self-harming. My secret came out. My cousin found

the account and texted my mom. My family now finally after 4 years found out that I was cutting.

When I was in 8th grade my best friend from out of state took his own life on September 25th, 2015. I was the last person he talked to. When he called me about 9pm the night of the 24th I knew something was wrong. He was crying and the first words out of his mouth were "Kennedy I can't do this anymore, I want to give up." I immediately went into the mode of I must get him to stay. Between calling the hotline and using all the resources I had access to I still couldn't save him. It was about 4am when he told me to go to sleep. He was calmed down, he said he wasn't going to do anything. About 4:15 I got the last message I would ever receive from him. I was in denial, I didn't want to believe it. I asked myself where I went wrong, how I could've helped better. But I couldn't save him. His suicide taught me a lot. I was 14 turning 15. I didn't know what to do, who to call, where to go, I didn't know how to handle this. And this is one of the reasons I believe we should teach the students about suicide and mental illnesses that way they have proper access to resources, and they know what to look for when it comes to their friends. If I had more info on resources and the warning signs, maybe I could've saved my friend. But that's not what happened.

Freshman year is when everything would change. The bullying was still going on. And I was battling some trauma that no one knew about. Now at my previous school we never talked about suicide or mental health. That was a topic I knew a lot about but wasn't been taken seriously. I showed all the signs. I was just getting worse and no one noticed. I played the role of the happy girl so no one would be bothered by my problems. I wanted to show everyone I

was okay. Freshman year held pain. Freshman year held multiple E.R. visits because my panic attacks were so bad that it was causing physical health problems. At school my freshman year I was pretty much bound to the resource room and office. I was going downhill, but continued to make sure everyone else was okay, no one saw what was coming next.

May 5th, 2017. The day that changed my whole life. Before I talk about May 5th, 2017. I want to talk about a week before. A week before May 5th, 2017 I walked into the office and gave a letter to the school principle. That letter was a suicide note. It was my cry for help. It wasn't for attention. The principle read the letter asked what it was for. I told him my thoughts and what was in the letter. He said okay and sent me back to class. Now, did my family find out about this letter. No. They had no idea I was that bad.

May 5th, 2017 started like a regular day. Name calling, panic attacks, and feelings of not wanting to be alive. I remember the first thing that a fellow classmate had said to me was "Next time you draw on yourself, draw on yourself with a razor". That phrase pushed me over the edge. Right before 2nd period I went into the bathroom and took a dangerous amount of Tylenol. I had just overdosed, and no one knew. An hour went by and I started to get scared, I realized I didn't want to die. I just wanted the pain to stop. I told a teacher and the called the ambulance. My parents got the phone call saying that I was being taken by ambulance to the hospital. I'm not supposed to be alive right now. The doctors don't know how I am alive because of the amount of Tylenol I took. May 5th, 2017 was my 7th suicide attempt. I survived, and my life was changed forever.

My sophomore year I started at Midkota High school, which was a blessing to me. If I had went to Midkota before May 5th, 2017 I would not be speaking in front of you because I would not be who I am. I would not be where I am in life.