

Committee Chair and members of the committee, my name is Carla Couture. I am a lifelong resident of Williston, North Dakota, a wife of 32 years, and a proud mother of four sons. I am here today in opposition of HB 1628, but I am also here as a mother who is trying to keep her son alive. I am asking you to amend this bill to include a full ban on kratom, including products marketed as pure kratom.

I want you to understand that this is not an abstract policy issue for my family. It is the sound of a parent walking down the hallway in the middle of the night, holding her breath before opening her son's bedroom door. It is living every day with the fear that the next quiet moment could be the moment everything changes.

At first, I was relieved. Andrew had found something over the counter that seemed to help his pain, and the bottle gave me no reason to believe it could hurt him. But a few months later, he came into our room around 10 p.m. and said he was going to a friend's house for a kratom party. That was the moment my relief turned into fear. I began researching kratom, and what I found made me realize this was not the harmless, natural product I thought it was.

For more than a year, our home revolved around Andrew's safety. My husband, Glenn, would text me throughout the day asking when I had last seen him. When he came home, that was often the first question he asked. If I said it had been an hour or two, he went straight to Andrew's room to make sure he was still with us. I did the same in the mornings. I would wait to hear movement from his bedroom, and if I heard nothing, I walked to his door praying that he was only sleeping.

After more conversations and guidance from an addiction counselor, we decided Andrew would begin outpatient treatment, with the possibility of medication to help him get clean. That process has started, but the nightmare has not ended. I still do not sleep much because I am still trying to keep my son alive.

This is why I am asking for a stronger bill. The issue is not only whether one product on the shelf appears natural or is marketed as pure. The issue is that families like mine have no reliable way of knowing what is in these products, how strong they are, how addictive they may be, or what safeguards exist when a young person begins taking them every day. Until North Dakota has clear rules, testing, labeling, and medical oversight, these products should not be treated as safe.

We have seen our federal government take time before allowing even familiar medications to be sold over the counter. Ibuprofen was available by prescription in the United States in 1974, and it was not approved for over-the-counter sale at lower doses until 1984. If that level of review was expected for a common pain reliever, then North Dakota should not

treat kratom products as safe simply because they are labeled natural or pure. Heroin is a Schedule I drug, and the synthetic opioid compounds being addressed in kratom products are being treated as dangerous for good reason. To me, allowing products marketed as pure kratom to remain on shelves sends the wrong message: that a product sold in a smoke shop or convenience store can still be treated as safe if it stays below a certain threshold of 7-OH. Families should not have to trust that kind of limit when the consequences can be addiction, withdrawal, and death.

I am asking you to amend HB 1628 to include a full ban on kratom products, including products marketed as pure kratom, unless and until North Dakota has enforceable safeguards for testing, labeling, sale, and medical oversight. I also ask that you name this law Aaron's Law, in honor of Aaron, a 21-year-old from Williston who lost his life to Kratom on May 25, 2026.

Aaron would have turned 22 on September 5. Please show his mother, and every family living this nightmare, that Aaron's life mattered.

Thank you,

Carla Couture

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