

Good morning Chairman Lee and Senate Human Service members, for the record my name is Ashley Eastgate.

I'm here because I have direct experience in growing up in a drug addicted and alcoholic home, as well as watching my step-kids be removed completely from their mothers care due to alcohol and drug abuse when my husband and I had to take her to court, so you could say I'm passionate about this topic.

First, from a child's perspective, that was me. My dad and my mom were both raging alcoholics and drug addicts, although I didn't know about the drugs until I was a bit older. I watched my dad turn into a violent guy the minute he ingested alcohol, and when that happened I witnessed my mother and brother be beaten. The cops would come, dad and or mom would go to jail and the minute they were released they were home, until the next time, then the next. I'm a firm believer that the way I grew up set me up for failure as a young adult. I watched the adults in my life continuously go through this cycle of addiction, jails, and treatment centers time and time again not knowing that it was not normal. Every time they left a part of me left with them. Every time I could not understand as I now do the absolute damage and trauma that inflicted upon me. Ultimately I turned to drugs and alcohol myself at the age of 9. It's the only thing I knew next to being violent because it's what I was surrounded by. I ultimately started my own turns with jails, institutions and treatment centers for the next 13 years following that. I was lucky enough to be placed in a position that made me want to live a different way of life at the age of 22 when I found recovery. Most people aren't that lucky and unfortunately many die before they ever have the chance to find recovery.

I met my now husband in 2019 through recovery. He had two boys, ages 7 & 8. The mom was and still is in active addiction. In the beginning we made our own verbal agreement of having the boys each one week on, and one week off. At times the mom would pull it together to get them to school on time or at all and other times she would call us at midnight, on her week with the boys asking where they were. Another week in her care we get a call from the 7 year olds grandpa explaining he got a call from our son crying that he was lost by the mall, miles away from home. When the mom got a call she laughed and said that it was his own fault. We took her to court and got primary custody but they continued visitation. Again we had issues more often than not. She would ask the boys if they came over on a space ship. She would call and would say that she could hear the youngest screaming, when he was not even home. The mom at one point showed up their elementary school at noon on a Friday to get the kids from school, when the cops were called she said she had a gun and got the entire school on lockdown. Eventually, we got full custody. She has only had the opportunity to see them through the family safety center the last 2 1/2 years, and has not done so once. They rarely ever hear from her as she is in and out of institutions. She was supposed to do drug testing every 6 months and bring us the results, and that has not happened once. It's my belief that it's not as important to her as continuing to live the life she is.

What I can tell you from watching this firsthand is this, the times she was out of the picture, the boys made so much progress. We have had them in therapy for years working through the trauma. The

minute she would pop back up we would take 20 steps back. We would have emotional outbursts of tears or anger, more incidents in school, etc. As children they don't understand why their parent behaves irrationally. All they receive from that is trauma. They ask all of the questions, why can't we see our mom, etc.. now they are at the age that they understand drugs have changed their mom. They pick up on drugs being around, what it looks like, what alcohol tastes like even at 7 years old. Children should never be susceptible to the chaos and dysfunction that comes from addiction. They are so smart and they pick up on those things and eventually end up using them themselves because they don't know what a normal family looks like. This can help introduce these kids to a normal lifestyle, and most of them probably for the first time in their life, introduce them to love, a warm home with food on the table, a sense of normalcy and scheduling. Kids need guidance and support. When someone is in active addiction anything besides drugs and alcohol becomes secondary. Our children deserve to be the first priority, under all circumstances and that is what this bill does. Kids need sober parents. & parents will continue to keep doing what they're doing if there are no repercussions for their actions. I stand in favor of this bill and I hope you all will as well. Save our children from years of trauma, abuse and neglect.

Ashley Eastgate