

August 23, 2010

My name is Denise Cressman; I am a resident of Montour County. I would like to share our story with you and ask you to support House Bill 2585 and restore the sheriff's office authority and grant them equal rights under the law. I would like to personally thank Bob Belfanti, our House Representative for sponsoring this bill.

I am not a law enforcement officer or an elected official, nor am I married to one; I operate a registered family childcare and my husband is an engineer; and up until 2428 days ago, we were living the American Dream. We were a middle-class family, raising three young sons in "small town" America, our sons are fine young men, all honor roll students involved with school and our community.

On December 28, 2003, our American dream turned into a horrible, horrible, nightmare when we experienced every parent's worst scenario when we found our wonderful, talented, National Honor Society student dead in his bed. Eric was 18 years old and a senior in high school. He had been accepted at Penn State University, at University Park to study chemical engineering. Eric was a boy looking forward to a future full of endless possibilities---gone---as he lay blue, cold and lifeless in his bed where he should have been safe and warm. Our sanctuary, our place to keep our children safe was violated by EMTs, paramedics, police officers and coroners, body bags and funeral directors all doing the job they were assigned to do; no easier for them than for us. We were no longer safe and could no longer protect our children. Our child had

died....died under our roof, without our knowledge. How could this have happened? That question continues to echo in this house today. How could this have happened?

Just when we thought things couldn't get any worse, they did, as we began our journey into the "injustice" system. We lived our life as edited by the local newspapers.

The investigation into Eric's death was carried out at the local level by our district attorney and our police chief. Knowing who was responsible for Eric's death and proving it were two far different things. It was a frustrating, horrendous path further compounding our grief, instead of bringing us resolution, justice and a little closer to closure.

This is a very, very small town and the parents of the boy who was responsible for Eric's death are pillars of the community, and this town closed ranks around them to protect this family, and in the meantime they let a killer roam the streets, free to harm another parent's child. Witnesses refused to cooperate and no new information was coming to light; the case was stalled nowhere to go and nothing to do. We tried higher authorities within the state to no avail.

In January of 2005, more than a year after we had found our son dead in his bed, our local district attorney had a discussion with The Montour County Sheriff's Office in reference to Eric's case. We never asked why, we just know that this was the turning point in our son's case. After examining the records, the sheriff's office, using the resources available to them, took the records to the

United States Attorney's office in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. Open lines of communication, within the confines of the law, were established between the survivors (our family), the sheriff's office and the Assistant U.S. Attorney. If the sheriff's office couldn't answer a question or divulge information, they were upfront and honest with that answer. The sheriff's office continued to include our local district attorney and our local police chief in the investigation. Was this a perfect relationship? No, there were many days we agreed to disagree, but we knew what we finally had was a champion in our corner, who was talking with us, so we accepted that disagreement was a good thing.

As a result of our sheriff's office's relationship with the U.S. Attorney, a Federal Grand Jury was convened and in August 2005 they indicted the young man responsible for Eric's death. He was sentenced on February 26, 2009 in U.S. District Court in Williamsport, Pennsylvania to 17 years in federal prison for Eric's death.

I was raised in the 60's where we left our doors unlocked and our keys in the ignition. My parents didn't worry about a spouse being killed at work or my siblings or I being gunned down at school. In a society, where crime has become the norm rather than the exception and drug trafficking is on the rise and as a result secondary crime is also on the rise, we should be doing all we can to empower our sheriff's offices across this commonwealth. In rural Pennsylvania, where our state police barracks can be more than a half-hour away, our sheriff's office is often our primary line of defense and they should have full partnership and equal rights with other law enforcement departments.

Please support House Bill 2585 and empower our sheriff's office to do their job and get them back on the streets protecting our community so we can all sleep a little easier tonight and every night.

We will be forever grateful to our sheriff and his office for their personal involvement into the investigation into Eric's death. These people are our everyday heroes. It is our firm belief that without the direct involvement of our sheriff's department, the young man responsible for Eric's death, would still be free.....free to kill someone else's child.