

Good afternoon Chairman and members of the Committee. I want to thank you for letting me come here today to share my son's story and why this legislation HB1684 is so important in saving lives! My name is Eileen Miller and my husband is Paul Miller. We were blessed with two wonderful children. We have an amazing daughter Nicole who in July gave us our first beautiful granddaughter Kaia Rose. We also are the proud parents of our handsome and hardworking son, Paul Miller Jr. Paul although still considered young had his future planned out and a big part of it included giving back to his community and the less fortunate. He had an infectious smile and a contagious upbeat attitude about life. Paul Miller Jr. was only 21 years old when his life was not only tragically but senselessly cut short due to distracted driving. This is HIS story.

Before I speak of his crash, allow me to tell you a little bit about my son, Paul Jr. He was on track to receive his Degree in Sociology in the fall with a concentration in Criminal Justice. His last day at East Stroudsburg University was sadly and coincidentally also the day he was killed. He was supposed to start his internship in two weeks with the Lackawanna County Juvenile Probation Center Office. Paul was very excited to start his internship and did not want to wait until September to start. When Paul passed I wanted to see if I could get his diploma so I reached out to ESU about getting it. They told me by law if Paul did not earn it, they could not give it to me. His entire life he had wanted to become a police officer. In August 2006 he took his first step at making it a reality. Paul went to Lackawanna College in the ACT 120 Program. Paul found out about a month or so into the program he was too young to have a permit to carry a gun. In September he switched all his classes over to Criminal Justice and put being a police officer on the back burner. He never ruled out becoming a police officer but found a greater passion in working with kids. He wanted to mentor and lead the kids on the right path in life. He wanted to keep them from being a number in the system. This was Paul. He always was passionate about helping others. His heart was just THAT big. He was known as the peacemaker and the protector. With the credits from the Act 120, East Stroudsburg University mailed me his diploma POSTHUMOUS. It's my most prized possession because he worked so hard for it!!!!

On July 4, 2010, my son just came home from working at Gerrity's Supermarket at 3:00 and said, "Mom, I'm going to go visit friends from ESU. I Love you and I'll be back later." He kissed me and hugged me like he always did and I told him, "I love you, too." I never imagined THAT would be the last time I would hear those words I LOVE YOU from him or see him ALIVE again. He ended up staying overnight in Bethlehem, PA for a couple of reasons. Paul had a couple of drinks, he was tired, and most importantly he was out a lot further than he originally thought. He called friends and said he would be staying the night. My son did everything right that night!!! Paul was a responsible driver. Paul had tried calling me at six and ten o'clock. Regrettable, I missed those calls. Even back then he did not like leaving messages or text. The next morning my son got up called Gerrity's telling them I'm going to be a little late for work. He was actually not scheduled to work that day. He was covering for someone, once again this shows how responsible he was, even at twenty-one. His boss, Mark, said, "Paul it's slow, it's the holiday. Just take your time, go home, take a shower, when you get here you get here." I was home sitting on my porch waiting for friends to come. We were having a little get together for the holiday. At approximately 11:45 a.m., two state trooper cars pulled up back to back by my house. As if, out of a movie scene my heart sank. I already had a horrible feeling something was wrong that morning. It was a gut wrenching feeling I felt all day. They asked me, "Is this 1407 Fig St? The Miller residence?" I said, "Yes!" They asked if my husband was home. I said, "Yes!" I already asked them if it was my son Paul? They insisted that Paul and I both go inside, so they could talk to us. We sat in our living room and then the questions started. Why would your Toyota Corolla be down on route 33? We both said, "We never heard of Route 33?" They said, "Well It's by East Stroudsburg." And we both said, "Well that's where our son was going to a Party?" They then asked would he ever let anyone else ever drive that car? We answered, "No never!!! He was extremely responsible." He then said, "We are sorry to inform you but we believe your son was killed in a head on crash this morning in Hamilton Township on Route 33." All I remember was dropping to my knees screaming and yelling and saying, **"Not my son!! Not my boy!! He was the best boy ever!! Why him not my Paul???"** To this day I can still remember my gut wrenching screams!! My husband called the Pocono Medical Center where my ONLY son was taken to. The coroner asked about any markings on my son. His Dad said he had three tattoos. She said, "He did not have any tattoos." So,

his Dad and I had some glimmer of hope, but our Paul never came home. I told my husband I wanted to go see him. We were told he was a "Criminal Case" so we couldn't clean him up nor could we see him". I told my husband they are NOT STOPPING me I'm GOING and I'm SEEING him not matter what!! We were not allowed to go down to the morgue until after 3:00pm due to back up from the crash and reconstruction of the crash. The time had come when we were finally escorted to the morgue. It was AND still is the LONGEST, DARKEST walk of my life that never seemed to end. We walked into the smallest, coldest room I have ever been in. There I was with my husband, the coroner, and a lifeless body, a body that could NOT be my son. This lifeless body I was looking at was in a silver color, tin foil body bag zipped up and all that I could see was a head sticking out. The face I was looking at was full of glass, rocks, tree bark, dried blood, and it reeked of diesel fuel. This could NOT be MY son. Sadly, I could not identify if this was my child without unzipping the body bag. The face and head I was staring at looked that bad, even as HIS Mom, I could not recognize him. I then communicated that to the coroner. I told her I had to look at his clothes to see what he was wearing from the day before to confirm, it was in fact, **MY PAUL**. When I unzipped his body bag I just could not believe at how badly broken and disfigured my son was. Less than twenty-four hours ago, he was handsome, strong, and knew where he was going in life. I'm now looking at him broken into a million pieces. Not only was my son broken, but in that moment my family's lives were irrevocably changed forever and we became completely broken. I then asked for a priest to come and pray the rosary with me. As I waited for the priest to arrive, I went to Paul's head where I could see right into it. I whispered into his ear and said, "How honored I was to be your mom Paul, but you always knew that. When I find out what happen to you and I will. God knows I will find out. I will fight for change. I will never ever let this happen to another person and I will fight for a law for you!! No one should **EVER** have to view their child in a morgue like that over something so preventable!!!!

Please, allow me to give you the details of my son's crash that happened on July 5, 2010. The crash that left Paul's family and friend's devastated beyond measure and lead me to speaking here today. On July 5, 2010, my twenty-one-year-old son was on his way back to work at Gerrity's in Scranton, PA. Paul was traveling

northbound and a tractor-trailer was traveling southbound. Based on eye-witness statements, the driver of the tractor-trailer had been seen for miles driving not only carelessly, but recklessly. He was witnessed speeding, lane switching, and driving erratically. He would eventually lose control of his tractor trailer, becoming jackknifed while veering across two south bound lanes of traffic. He would then cross the grassy median, and finally crash into the oncoming traffic of the Northbound lanes, hitting Paul head on. The driver of the tractor trailer pushed Paul's car upon an embankment. Not only was he going 69 mph in a 45-mph zone, but he was speeding through a work zone when he slammed into my son's car. A van traveling behind my son's car was carrying 12 people also, hit the tractor trailer. Three of those victims were taken to trauma centers via helicopter. The remaining nine were sent to local hospitals. My son was the only fatality and pronounced dead at the crash scene.

Almost a year after our son's death, my husband Paul started club dragging his left foot and walking into walls. We started going to doctors which then sent him for emg's, x-rays, cat scans and Mri's. After almost 2 years to the day of our son's death my husband got the devastating news that he was diagnosed with ALS known as Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis known as Lou Gehrig's Disease. The Doctors can't prove it but we definitely believe the stress and anxiety of our son's preventable death triggered it.

The Distracted driver that killed Paul Jr's. not only took my son's life but will likely take my husband's life as well.

Our family was not just affected once by distracted driving but twice. On August 21, 2016, we were rear ended on I-80 in Monroe county. Our handicapped van, which we had to purchase for my husband, due to his ALS, was rear ended and pushed us forward into another car. Both Paul and I were taken to the hospital. The driver of the vehicle that hit us stated he was driving distracted. Once again, proving that Distracted Driving is growing at an alarming rate!!!! This time we were listed as a distracted driving crash. When my son was killed he was listed as a road crash fatality on the FARS report. In 2010 and even to this day, the numbers are not completely accurate with regards to road fatalities and

distracted driving. At the time of Paul's crash, they did not even consider distracted driving as a cause of the crash, nor did they consider charging him. I had to fight for that. It was his statements which made me look into that he was distracted, reaching for his phone. I actually met with him thru the OVA... Office of Victim Advocate.

I have forgiven Him, and he did admit to me he was distracted. Also, I want to tell you Jennifer Storm could not be here today, as she is in a State College presenting at a conference. She however sent me an email stating she will let the House Leadership and membership know that OVA Office Victim Advocate are very supportive in this effort!!

Eyes on the Road, Hands on the Wheel, and Mind on Task and Just Drive!!

Please let's try to help make it to zero fatalities and pass this bill!!

In closing, I would like to say, our family name ends at the death of our only son, my granddaughter will never know the love Paul would have had for her. My son will never get married or have children, and the world lost a soul that set out to make this place a better place to live. My son may have left this world on July 5, 2010, but he lives on through the fight to end distracted driving. I am his voice now and I will fight to my last breath to pass this bill. Honestly and selfishly, I don't know how much longer my husband will be here on earth, but I'd like for him and I to see this bill passed in honor of our son, Paul J. Miller, Jr. and in honor of ALL victims of distracted driving.

Thank you for allowing me to speak here today and lets all work together to make our roads safe!!

Sincerely,

Eileen Miller

Road Safety Advocate and Paul Miller, Jr's Mom





