

Thank you, Representative Schomaker, and the Human Services Finance and Policy Committee allowing my voice to be heard today.

My name is Will Rops, I live, and grew up in Pipestone, Minnesota, and on November 17th of 2022, my mom, Tish, came back from her second job as a home health aide to find her oldest son, Justin, lifeless and cold to the touch. Justin died of a fentanyl overdose at just 25 years old. He left behind a legacy of being a star athlete, a loving boyfriend, and a human being full of compassion working as a paraprofessional for struggling children in alternative schools.

Every single day, families in Minnesota, the Midwest, and the entire country are being ripped apart by the opioid and fentanyl epidemic. I'm here today because I want to save lives. I want to protect other families from experiencing the tragedy that mine has by testifying in support of SF164

When Justin died, I was a junior at Minnesota State University – Moorhead. Everyone in this room is aware that college is a time of transition, a time for trying new things and experimenting. This transition simply makes college students more likely to use opioids. My brother was taking classes online at the time to become a special education teacher.

After Justin's death, it became clear to me that while our universities rightfully focused on not using opioids to begin with, they lacked the framework to support students still choosing to use opioids on campus. This framework can begin with you by stocking naloxone in campus resident halls where students are most likely to overdose.

By choosing not to keep naloxone in residence halls, we are subjecting students to unjustifiable death sentences, relying on students being lucky enough to not receive opioids laced with fentanyl, or to be extremely intentional about the amount they are taking.

At my former university, Minnesota State University – Moorhead, not only is naloxone not stocked in residence halls, but it's also not currently carried by campus security. If a student were to overdose at Moorhead, they would be reliant first on emergency services being called, then on those emergency services being able to get into the residence halls, finding the overdose person and then on emergency services administering naloxone, and reversing the overdose. That is far too many steps.

In October of last year, Minnesota's Department of Health released data showing that overdose deaths decreased between 2022 to 2023 by 8% in large part thanks to naloxone being more accessible.

Because of a single fentanyl laced pill, my family's life was changed forever. Justin's death was the worst moment of my life. For me, it meant no more family trips, no more family dinner memories, and no more Sunday afternoon football trash-talking sessions with my brother. For his girlfriend of four years it meant no wedding, no babies, and no growing old with Justin. And for my mom, it meant no more big, warm, Justin bear hugs.

I began working on this bill because I wanted to turn this grief into action. Now, after nearly two years of working on this bill, I'm passing the rest of the work onto the members of this committee.

By passing SF164, you have the opportunity to be part of the solution to ending overdose deaths in Minnesota. We are in a position to lead the country in overdose response. I'm asking this committee today to help make Minnesota a guiding star for what it means to care about our communities. Help us get a step closer to ending overdose deaths once for all. Help me ensure Minnesota families don't experience the horrible tragedy that mine has gone through.

I thank this committee for their time consideration.