

Jim Alvey
Bill 1230
In Person Testimony
3/26/2024

My name is Jim Alvey . I'm here in support of Bill 1230.

“Gas Station Heroin” - **Kratom, Tianeptine and Phenibut** - took over my son's life and his addiction to them eventually lead to his death at age 33. This bill seeks to prevent this from happening to others, specifically regarding Tianeptine, for those under the age of 21.

Let me tell you about my son -

We called him “JT”. He was a Spirit of Columbia scholarship winner and graduated with honors from University of NC (one of the happiest days of my life) and was accepted into the Johns Hopkins School of Business. He had a successful IT career and was blessed with talent, intellect, looks, strength, and a heart of gold. He was and still is my pride and joy. His death broke many hearts. Over 250 family and friends attended his memorial.

But he suffered from anxiety and other behavioral challenges. He sought out products like **Kratom** to relieve stress without any legal consequences. When he built up tolerance and **Kratom** wasn't enough, he turned to **Tianeptine and Phenibut**. **Tianeptine** is sold at gas stations and online under names like “**ZaZa Red,**” and “**Neptune's Elixir**”.

Websites and packaging claim these drugs treat anxiety and depression, improve memory, increase mental alertness and concentration, and boost energy levels. In fact, these drugs have no legitimate medical use and do not meet the FDA's definition of a dietary supplement.

Instead, I saw them cause JT to have **rapid heart rate, vomiting, seizures, loss of consciousness, and even putting him into a coma.**

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I also witnessed **depression, anxiety, shakes, and sleep disorders** in his attempts at quitting... symptoms JT thought these drugs would help him with... instead he told us withdrawal from Tianeptine felt “like death”.

To avoid withdrawals, these pills must be taken every 2-3 hours!

Still, Tianeptine is virtually unknown in the health space. Nobody tests, so nobody knows. Maryland needs to correct this, at least in our state.

6 months before he died, JT left a rehab to try to kick his addictions on his own. He got a hotel room and bought **Tianeptine**. He was alone, had seizures, hit his head so hard it cracked his skull and left a gaping hole, broke his foot, and fell into a coma. I personally saw the blood-stained room this happened in and cleared out his personal belongings. There were **Tianeptine pills and bottles** everywhere!

JT was in a coma almost a week at Maryland Shock Trauma but miraculously survived this episode. Surely, we thought, he must have hit rock bottom.

But sadly, his addiction called him back and when the same chain of events occurred 6 months later, he was found dead in a Days Inn in Cambridge, MD.

So, to me and my wife - this bill (with amendments) will bring a small sense of relief, that JT’s death can save other’s lives. We need to get this drug out of stores and make it illegal to sell under any circumstances.

9 states have made Tianeptine illegal - **Alabama and Kentucky** have even labeled **Tianeptine** a Schedule 1 substance. **Where is Maryland on this list?**

This bill (with amendments) is a GIANT step forward. A \$5,000 penalty vs. selling a drug that led to JT’s death is not nearly what we would want. But we cannot get our son back. Please vote **YES** on this bill and join other states that have done that.

Next session, we can tackle Phenibut – the other OTC drug that led to his death.