

Good Evening. My name is Troy Peck. I live in Cranston, RI with my wife Ashley, and two children, Elliott and Aspen. Today I'm here with Aspen to urge the passing of HB7103 to protect Rhode Islanders from the perils of medical debt.

On January 15, 2021, after battling a fever for nearly 10 days and just turning 1, Aspen went to the emergency room at Hasbro Children's Hospital where she was diagnosed with leukemia. Within a few days we found out Aspen's official diagnosis; RAM-phenotype acute myeloid leukemia with a GLIS-2 fusion, a rare and aggressive form of AML associated with poor outcomes and high rates of relapse. The doctors told us it would be a miracle if she makes it to kindergarten. For context, known survivors of this disease are in the single digits and all under 10. Aspen's only chance of survival was a bone marrow transplant. To reach transplant, we needed to reduce Aspen's disease burden from over 80% to 0%. 80% of Aspen's blood was cancer and it would continue to climb without immediate intervention.

With the weight of the world on our shoulders we were forced to make life saving decisions without regard for the cost. There's a menu of sorts with your options, ranging from hospice to various treatment options, but there's no price tag. We chose to fight. Aspen went through 2 30-day inpatient rounds of chemotherapy before going to transplant where she was admitted for an additional 80-days. During her fight, Aspen endured multiple stays in the ICU.

To compound matters, at 8-months post-transplant, Aspen's cancer returned. Though the use of an investigational drug, Aspen is here today, nearly 2-years in remission. Aspen continues to deal with a host of health issues related to treatment and will encounter more as she grows, which is a double edge sword, insofar as I want Aspen to live long enough to realize her dream of becoming a veterinarian, but it will come at a financial cost.

If this sounds expensive, it is. As of December 31, 2023, Aspen's total cost of care is at \$1,056,789.

Early in Aspen's first admission, we sat down with the social worker to go over piles of paperwork. During that meeting, we were given grocery gift cards and my wife said "why do we need this? Are we going to be broke?" In response, the social worker said they would try to help avoid us going broke, but that we should set up a GoFundMe to help cover any expenses during treatment. Bills do not stop just because your child has cancer. We still had to pay a mortgage, student loans, utilities, car payments, groceries, etc. We relied on charity to cover our basic expenses because neither of us could work while caring for a child in the hospital fighting for their life and another at home terrified of losing his sister.

While we were able to raise \$100,000.00 via GoFundMe, this is the exception not the norm. One big topic in the cancer community is "how do we not go broke?" The conversation deviates from how to treat to how to not lose my house, how to feed my children. What if I lose my job and health insurance? When you finally come out of the other side of treatment, you should not have to worry about whether your house will be taken, your wages garnished, or your credit destroyed, which will further inhibit you from finding a new job, all from a debt that you have no control over.

Please pass HB7103 to ensure Rhode Islanders are not crushed by medical debt.

Thank you for your time.