

Wyatt's Law Testimony 11-2-21

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When my son Wyatt was just 4 months old, my husband at the time just stopped coming home at night. Out of nowhere. When I questioned him about it all he would say is "I'm trying to find myself" "Not sure if I was ready to be a Dad". So I decided to try and be as supportive as I could and just hope and prayed that he would come back home. I had never felt that alone since my mom had died. This isn't the way life was supposed to work. How was I all of the sudden a single mom? I was raised to be married before I had a child with someone. I did everything the way I was raised to be, and I just didn't understand why this was happening. But I couldn't wallow and soak in my self-pity; I had an infant to take care of. And that was my focus. I became suspicious that my husband wasn't "finding himself" that he instead was having an affair. He denied it and made me feel like absolute garbage for even suggesting it. But I had someone I knew see him out with another woman and snapped some pretty intimate photos of them. As soon as I brought "the evidence" to him, he finally admitted to it. I knew in that moment my marriage was over. I then filed for divorce in May of 2013.

As soon as I filed, things got nasty. My ex was so verbally abusive towards me. Made me truly feel like I wasn't good enough and blamed him cheating on me being a horrible wife. Then all of the sudden, the son he had left for months, he wanted visitations with. The woman he was having an affair with, Rachel Edwards, I had only met once. She rubbed me the wrong way though. I then had heard a rumor that she didn't have custody of her own children. It was another red flag to me. But when I would drop off Wyatt with his father, she would be there with her 3 kids. So it didn't make much sense. Still, I couldn't ignore the feeling that I had about her. I didn't want Wyatt around her. I expressed my fears to my attorney and explained that I wanted to prevent Wyatt's Dad from overnight visits. I was terrified he would leave Wyatt alone with her. So I tried to pull up whatever I could on her. I first called DHS to see if she had custody of her children, but they are not allowed to give out that info. **I then searched her name on Google, looked her up on something we have here in Michigan called OTIS (Offender tracking information system), and even searched her on the Sex Offender Registry. I came up empty on each search and I didn't have her birthdate either.** We had our custody hearing, I explained the referee my concerns and feelings, but since I didn't have proof, she granted my ex overnight visits. The anxiety I experienced after that hearing, crippled me. I couldn't sleep well at night, eat well, and it was even affecting me at work. I just had to trust though that my son's father would keep him safe.

In the early morning of Friday November 1, 2013 I received a phone call from Wyatt's father whom he was with for the weekend that Wyatt had been rushed to Children's Hospital of Michigan because he was "breathing funny". My ex had said he was at work and he would meet me at the hospital. One of the things that came to my mind was who the heck was Wyatt left alone with?! My ex-husband gave me his word that when he was at work his mother was watching Wyatt, not Rachel Edwards. Frantic and shaking, I called my brother to drive me to hospital because I was in no shape to drive. I called my ex on my way to the hospital and he admitted to me on my way down there, that he left Wyatt alone with Ms. Edwards. My heart dropped into my stomach. I was livid, but my main focus was getting to the hospital

to Wyatt. I had NO idea what I was walking in on. I was thinking maybe he had an allergic reaction or he had a cold and they were just taking him down to the hospital for precaution.

When I walked into Children's Hospital ER, I was stopped immediately by a member of the neurosurgery team. The moment her eyes looked into mine, I knew what she was about to say was going to be bad. She told me Wyatt is awaiting emergency surgery because he has a major brain bleed and fractured skull that they were believed were due to a non-accidental injury. I dropped to me knees and started becoming hysterical. All I kept asking her is "Is my baby going to be ok?" "He's going to make it right?" and all she could tell me is he was in the best place possible and they were going to do everything they could. The feeling of not knowing whether your child is going to live or die is something I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy.

I got to see Wyatt before he went into emergency surgery. I took about 4 steps into the room and stopped in horror. I saw my baby boy lying in a hospital bed unconscious. He was stripped down to his diaper, gray looking, his eyes were rolled in the back of his head. He had a neck brace around his neck, was attached to a ventilator so I could barely see his precious face. And was attached to tons of monitors and hooked up to IVs. My happy smiley baby boy was laying there looking so lifeless. It is an image that plays over in mind over and over again every single day.

The 4 + hours he was in surgery were the longest hours of my life. But instead of being able to sit with my family to comfort me, I had to be interviewed by CPS agents, doctors, etc. I understand it was just protocol, but it was not what I needed at that time. While I was being interviewed I was also trying to pray at the same time. I could not lose my baby boy. Once Wyatt made it through surgery I was able to go see him the PICU. He looked pretty much the same as I saw him before his surgery except now he had a giant incision on his head from the surgery. He was hooked up to life support and the doctors told me the next 48 hours would be critical. At this point all I could do is sit by Wyatt's bedside and pray. The doctors advised me that including the brain bleed and fractured skull that Wyatt also had broken ribs and bilateral retinal hemorrhages. They told me his injuries were consistent with shaken baby syndrome. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I couldn't believe that a human being was capable of hurting an innocent one year old child. I was so devastated and angry and my mind kept going back to Rachel Edwards. But I could not focus my energy on her, Wyatt needed me and I had to let the authorities do their investigation. Wyatt spent a week on life support. I watched him choke on his breathing tube, cry in agony, and when they tried to take his breathing tube out the first time, they had to resuscitate him. I was living a real life nightmare. But Wyatt the warrior as we call him survived that week and was taken off life support. He then was moved to the rehab unit of the hospital where he spent 7 weeks. All of Wyatt's milestones that he had learned from holding his own head up to rolling over, he had to learn over again. I had to bottle feed him and then burp him after just like a newborn. Because of the damage to Wyatt's eyes, his eyes were cocked to one side. He was deemed blind. He couldn't move his left side. He had a rigorous 6 day schedule of physical, occupational, and speech therapy. 3 weeks into rehab we noticed Wyatt's incision was bubbling up which indicated he might have developed fluid on the brain from his injuries. CT scan indeed showed that Wyatt had developed hydrocephalus would need another brain surgery to install a shunt into his brain to keep the fluid drained. His incision was just starting the healing process on his head and again, he had to have his head

opened up again. But Wyatt made it through that surgery and we were released from the hospital just before Christmas. I was so thankful to have been released but I knew it was going to be a long road ahead.

That long road still continues today. Wyatt is almost 8 years old. I still cannot work full time because Wyatt still rotates between outpatient Physical, Occupational, and Speech therapies. Plus countless doctor's appointments and tests. He has had a total of 4 brain surgeries and 2 eye surgeries and countless MRI's, X-rays, CT scans, and EEG's. Wyatt is terrified of being held down and just doctors touching him in general (can't blame him) so things like his annual eye dilation exam or a dental cleaning/exam he has to be put under anesthesia for. Due to his shaking, he is blind in his left eye. This causes him balance issues making him prone to falling and running into things. He has to wear a special helmet at his school or on the playground because he falls so much. He suffers from seizures due to his shaking and is on daily medication for that. Another thing Wyatt struggles with his focusing and sitting still. Both those are common with a major traumatic brain injury. So he takes 2 medications for that. He cannot handle the texture of his medications so I must administer them to him with Pediasure via a baby bottle. It is the ONLY way he will take it. One of the hardest things Wyatt deals with is hypersensitivity to sounds and large crowds. The slightest sound can spiral Wyatt into agonizing discomfort. He'll scream and cry and put his hands on his ears. It seriously could be as little as the sound of air squeezing out of a water bottle. He completed several months of a new therapy called Pelvic Floor Dysfunction therapy. In this therapy, electrodes are placed on his buttocks to try and teach Wyatt to relax and strengthen his pelvic muscles. Does that sound fun to you? Wyatt's brain is different than a typical 7 year old's because of his brain damage. His mind is very innocent. He still loves toddler programs like Sesame Street and Mickey Mouse Clubhouse.

One of the hardest things I struggle with is the fact that I gave birth to a perfect healthy child. He was not born with a damaged brain. Rachel Edwards did this to him. She took my son's innocence away. She took away his future of being able to choose whatever he wanted to be in life. To quote Wyatt's PMR doctor, Dr. Edward Dabrowski: "Wyatt will always be totally dependent on his mother for all his needs. He will not be able to be gainfully employed, make executive decisions, manage expenses, etc." Wyatt's brain damage is not temporary, it's permanent. Wyatt can't dress himself, has a hard time using simple things like a fork, and has a hard time using the bathroom on his own. He needs help with all of that. He should be able to do these things on his own, but instead I have to help him with all of that.

Wyatt is not the first child Rachel Edwards was convicted of abusing. Rachel was convicted twice before of child abuse before getting her hands on Wyatt. It still kills me she only got probation and fines BOTH times. And it kills me even more that the suspicions I had when I was going through my divorce about Rachel Edwards were indeed true. I have no doubt in my mind that Rachel Edwards would hurt another child if she was released from prison. Rachel Edwards was sentenced to her second conviction of child abuse on October 22, 2013. Judge gave her probation and fines and it took her just 10 days to get her hands on and almost kill another child. She has never shown or expressed any remorse for her crimes. In 2015, Rachel Edwards took a plea deal and was convicted on 2nd degree child abuse. Her sentence given was 33 months-10 years. This past April, Rachel Edwards was granted early parole. So she is now back in society and could easily hurt another child. It's my biggest fear. Because people who abuse children,

always likely abuse again. I remember thinking after I found out Ms. Edward's criminal history...how do people who sexually assault children have to register, but not those who physically abuse/neglect children? That's when I started this journey of Wyatt's Law. I knew I had to do something.

There was a case of child abuse in the city of Ecorse. Twin boys who were 1 years old were abused violently. Same age Wyatt was when he was abused. Their injuries included bleeding on the brain, retinal hemorrhaging, and multiple broke bones including a broken femur. You know how hard it is to break a bone like that on a baby? Babies have super flexible bones. So I don't even want to imagine the amount of forced it took to break this innocent child's femur. One of the twin boys unfortunately didn't make it. The other twin boy is currently in critical condition at Children's Hospital of Michigan. The mother of these boys had a live in boyfriend. It is alleged that the boyfriend caused these injuries. Her boyfriend was just paroled on May 8th, 2020 for a child abuse conviction out of Traverse City. Neighbors explained on the news that they noticed markings on these precious boys before. I can't help but think if Wyatt's Law had already been passed, this "man" would have had to register his new address in Ecorse and a neighbor could have seen a convicted child abuser was living on their street, they would of spoke up sooner.

Child abuse is up 30% in the State of Michigan. According to the Michigan Kids Count that comes out every year, the last year of data (2017) showed that Michigan had over 41,462 CONFIRMED cases of child abuse/neglect. How can anyone read that statistic and not immediately want to do something about it?? Most of the push back on Wyatt's Law is because of the cost. How do I answer to that? Well, the survivors of child abuse/neglect cost the United States \$124 BILLION dollars A YEAR in health care costs, lost worker productivity, special education programs, child welfare services, and criminal justice proceedings. *That is enough money to send 1.7 Million children to college. Staggering isn't it?! I'm sick of politicians putting a price tag on the safety and well-being of our most innocent and vulnerable members of society, our children. This legislation is written with every concern in mind. You must be convicted of child abuse 1st-4th degree to have to register. If you are convicted of 3rd or 4th degree child abuse, you have to register for 5 years. If you're convicted of 1st or 2nd degree child abuse you have to register for 10 years. If it were up to me, I believe anyone who is convicted of hurting a child should have to register the rest of their life, but I'm not a law maker. I have the belief if you take a child's innocence away, the state should take your freedom away forever. But again, that's not how the law works so all I can do is to fight for tool parents, caregivers, grandparents, etc. can use. Whether they're looking for a babysitter or dating someone new. Wouldn't you want to know if that person had been convicted of child abuse before?! Would you leave your child alone with them knowing they had been convicted of child abuse?! If your answer is no, then Wyatt's Law should be a no brainer. Since we aren't keeping these perpetrators behind bars, the public has a right to know who they are so we can at least keep our children away from them. Child abuse occurs in families of all races, cultures, and all socioeconomic levels. It does not discriminate; it happened to my child, it can happen to your child. People, who hurt children, have more rights than the children they hurt. Children don't have many rights. That's why I'm here today. I'm here to be a voice for those who don't have one. I'm here to fight to give children the rights and protection they desperately need. Wyatt's Law won't solve everything, but it's a huge start. We must break this cycle of abuse before it breaks our state and country.