

Kim Okerstrom: testimony in support of SF 1457; will testify in person

Good morning, my name is Kim Okerstrom and this is my husband Norm. We are residents of Plymouth. I am member of a grassroots organization called the Minnesota SCA Advocates and a member of Parent Heart Watch, which is the national organization solely dedicated to protecting youth from SCA and preventable sudden cardiac death by education and advocating for change.

Chairman Kunesh and members of the Senate Education Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to share our personal testimonies in support of the Cardiac Emergency Response Bill, Senate File 1457 and thank you to Senator Westlin for sponsoring this bill.

I would like to take you back to almost 16 years ago to June 16, 2009. Our son Teddy had just turned 16 on June 4, just got his drivers license and was looking forward to the second day of Trojan Power, Wayzata High Schools' summer conditioning program for his football team.

I was working in my office when Norm called me at 11:03 a.m. He was frantic and said "Kim, Teddy collapsed, they're doing CPR on him. I'm heading to the high school. Start praying and come!"

This was our introduction to the horrific world of Sudden Cardiac Arrest, often called SCA, or as the medical community calls it - Sudden Cardiac Death.

What happened? Why? How could this happen to a perfectly healthy, young, athletic 16-year-old? We learned that Teddy had been running light sprints at the end of the session. With more than 100 teammates running in lines, Teddy collapsed face first onto the turf field. His teammates alerted Coach Matt Lombardi. Coach Matt ran to Teddy's side and Teddy appeared to be having a seizure. He then stopped breathing and his lips and face turned blue. Matt quickly knew this wasn't a seizure but SCA. He yelled to another coach to run to the school to get the AED and call 911 and then he started chest compressions.

When the AED arrived, Coach Ryan Johnson applied the AED and it took one shock to convert Teddy's heart from the deadly arrhythmia of ventricular fibrillation to a normal pulse.

Because of these lifesaving actions, Teddy was able finish high school and graduate from college. He is currently a middle school history teacher in Denver and is working on a master's degree in counseling. He loves to ski in the winter and hike 14er's in the summer.

But, we are the minority of parents – less than 10% of people survive an out of hospital cardiac arrest. And SCA is the leading cause of death on school campuses – more than fires, violence, accidents, head injuries, or natural disasters. Over the past 15 years and being involved with Parent Heart Watch, we have gotten to know many parents whose child died in very, very similar circumstances. We have seen the pain and anguish as they grieve the loss of their sons and daughters. And we have tried to do what we can, alongside them, to prevent any other parent from losing a child from SCA.

That is why we are here today – to ask you to champion this bill. This bill currently includes key components for success. It includes a requirement – schools must implement a cardiac emergency response plan. It holds the school board accountable – leadership and accountability is key when implementing a plan. And it requires monitoring and training – an annual review to ensure the school is ready to respond each year. Implementation of this bill will ensure our wonderful Minnesota schools are prepared to save the life of someone's precious son or daughter.

Thank you.

My name is Norm Okerstrom. I am testifying in support of SF 1457 CERP in Schools Bill. (in Person)

When SCA strikes, there is NO WARNING. Unlike a “Heart Attack” which is a “Plumbing Problem” of one or more blocked coronary arteries, SCA is an ELECTRICAL Problem that causes the heart to stop pumping blood altogether. The person collapses and without quick and appropriate response AT THE SCENE prior to EMS arrival, the person in cardiac arrest almost always dies. It is critical that our schools are prepared and have a practiced plan in place and available AEDs.

This includes the understanding of the CARDIAC CHAIN OF SURVIVAL - the KEY LINKS or Steps, that should be taken immediately when someone collapses: RECOGNITION of the signs of SCA, CALL 911 and have another person GET AN AED, START CHEST COMPRESSIONS IMMEDIATELY. Once the AED arrives TURN IT ON and follow the voice and picture instructions until EMS arrives on the scene and takes over care.

Just think, TODAY in the United States, almost 1,000 individuals of ALL ages, will suffer Sudden Cardiac Arrest. Unfortunately, 90% of these individuals will not survive. Recent data from the American Heart Association states that of the 356,000 affected by SCA, 23,000 are young people under age 18. Parent Heart Watch, the national voice for the prevention of Sudden Cardiac Arrest in Youth also states that 1 in 300 youth have an undiagnosed heart condition that puts them at risk for SCA.

Sudden Cardiac Arrest happens to ANYONE, ANY TIME, ANY PLACE and at ANY AGE. AND it JUST happened AGAIN to a 16 year old Maple Grove male High School Student - who collapsed outside of the school on February 25th and tragically, he died. His Caring Bridge site said that this young man had a “lively spirit, a passion for science, sport and life!” His funeral was held yesterday.

When someone collapses from Sudden Cardiac Arrest, whether it’s a student, teacher, staff member or a volunteer or visitor to our schools, the chance of survival decreases 10% per minute. Immediate bystander intervention with Hands-Only CPR can triple the chance of survival. Using an AED BEFORE EMS arrival can boost survival rates up to 90%!

Implementing a Cardiac Emergency Response Plan in schools is neither difficult nor burdensome. In fact, I know this because I initiated the effort to help Wayzata High School become a ‘Project ADAM’ recognized ‘Heart Safe’ school in 2024 while I was employed as a Student Supervisor.

In a nutshell, this is how we implemented a CERP through the help of Project ADAM at Wayzata:

First, there must be support from the principal and other leaders to ensure success. Project Adam (as well as the American Heart Association will provide a very easy to follow template to SET UP a CERP Team).

We identified and invited logical staff members, a few key teachers and members of the Administration to form our CERP Team. Our District nurse presented the newly formed team with information on SCA and the need for rapid response. For those not previously trained in CPR and

use of an AED, we provided training which took 90 minutes. After our team was trained, we all agreed upon appropriate language to be used over our school provided radios and trained our floor office personnel and teachers how to initiate the CERP Team for rapid medical response.

Once we felt like we were ready, we invited the Project Adam team from Children's Hospital to conduct a "Mock Sudden Cardiac Arrest" drill at the high school where they would time and evaluate our response. This was conducted while students were in class so there was no disruption.

We passed the test under the time limit which was a big relief! Members of our CERP team commented that they felt empowered personally and felt good having worked well as a team and that there was actually A PLAN in place in case something were to happen. We took feedback from the Project ADAM representatives and implemented suggestions they offered into our Plan. Each year, the Wayzata CERP team will review and practice the CERP to become more and more confident and proficient.

In closing,

- Implementing a Cardiac Emergency Response Plan for schools is not difficult but it will take thoughtful leadership, commitment, planning and accountability.

- The Bill does NOT add an additional load on our teachers. Only a select few might be asked to be on a CERP team and many of these teachers self-identify and appreciate the opportunity to be part of this team.

- The Bill does not take students out of class unlike other mandatory school drills.

- Requiring schools to have a well thought out, written, practiced CERP as well as funding additional Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) where needed and providing funds for CPR training where needed will help each school community to be a much safer place to work, teach, learn and play.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration and support of Senate File 1457.