

February 23, 2018

TO: Committee Members

FROM: Robin Abel (Seattle Mother)

RE: Approval of HB259

"Dear Maria, my husband was driving behind you on the way home from work Sunday night, February 22, 2004. He stopped at the scene of your accident, he broke his way into your vehicle, he heard you breathing, he talked to 9-1-1, he held your hand, he encouraged you to hang in there.....he drove home and kissed his three children and wife goodnight. Days later tears still well up in his eyes, for he knows that where his story ends yours begins....." (Note from Mrs. Helen (Anthony) Cox)

I may be a bit emotional today in sharing this story because it is exactly 14 years ago this morning that I received the call that is every parent's worst nightmare.....it was Harborview Hospital and this woman said to me "is your daughter Maria Federici?" It was the only time in my life that I wanted to say NO. I had always been so proud to be Maria's mother but in that moment I didn't want that call to be about my daughter but I said "yes" and she said, she is in critical condition and you need to get here as soon as you can. That wasn't the call I expected...it was Sunday around midnight; Maria was 24, graduated from college and not living at home but suddenly I knew life had just changed.

When I got to the hospital, a social worker took me to a "quiet room." No one had told me if Maria was still alive so I grabbed this woman's arm as she reached for the door, and said "is she still alive" and she said "I don't know." We went in and sat down. Within minutes two doctors came in, but they didn't say anything. I looked up, their coats were so clean and white, there was no blood, and these doctors couldn't have been much older than Maria. Finally I said, "can you save her?" They just shook their heads but I asked again..."are you sure you can't save her? They said that she was bleeding out from the brain and it was now just a matter of time." Then I knew way there were there, "are you here for her organs? Yes, they said. I knew Maria would have wanted that so I spent the next few hours filling out the forms....not an easy thing to do in times of grief.

As my brother was driving me home to get my dogs and go back to his home in Port Orchard he told me what had happened to Maria. She had just finished her shift that night, closed the restaurant up and headed home around 11:15pm. Someone ahead of her, had lost a large black entertainment center and the board that went through Maria's windshield weighed 40 lbs. She was almost completely decapitated. She lost her eye sockets, cheekbones, nose and her upper palate was crushed and a good part of her frontal lobe had been destroyed. She had no face only large hole that went back to ¼ inch from her spinal column. Hearing that I realized it was probably best that Maria had passed that night because what would the quality of her life be like if she had survived? Around 7:00am the phone rang again, Harborview said, "come back she is still alive!" Because I donated her organs...they had kept her alive for organ donation and now they realized that this young woman was still fighting for her life. Now I was even more scared because what would the quality of her life be. The doctors said, she will never see, hear, speak and we don't think she will be able to move and we know she will have severe brain damage. Harborview pulled out all stops...they called the very best surgeons and gave my daughter a new face. At one point they had almost 30 doctors working on her and in the first surgery of 15 hours they gave her a new face.

How was my daughter going to financially survive the rest of her life? Her face had just cost over a million dollars and now there was a lifetime of medical and daily care needed! I contacted the King County Prosecutor and that is when he told me that what happened to Maria was not a crime, it was a littering ticket. That meant that Maria wouldn't even be eligible to apply for Crime Victim's Compensation. I immediately said...it may be too late for my daughter but it is not too late to change the law to protect other families on the road. Norm Maleng agreed to help me change the law, telling me that the tough work begins afterwards to educate the public. Maria's Law passed in our first year! Early on we met with the Truckers and gained their immediate support. They understood that this law enhanced their current 6 inch rule and they didn't consider this change anything but good for safety.

The tough work begins after the law is changed. It is one thing to change a law but it is a lifetime commitment to educate the public on the importance of load securement. I have worked hard to honor my promise to Norm Maleng. I have now changed two laws in Washington State and had language in two national transportation bills. The GAO study reported 440 deaths, 10,000 injuries and over 51,000 incidents and said that unsecured loads and road debris are a serious safety hazard. AAA is a strong believer in Secure Your Load mission and they too have done studies.

I now have a National Secure Your Load Day on June 6th. Last year I had 47 states participate in Secure Your Load Day and 7 states declared June 6th Secure Your Load Day. Governor Walker was one of the Governors who signed a Proclamation!

Please pass HB259. I know it will save lives, injuries and millions of dollars in litter.

Thank you

Robin Abel
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P.S. Maria is blind, but she can hear, talk, walk and dance. She doesn't believe that her life has changed at all and that is a good thing about the brain injury but I miss my daughter.