

Testimony for the Senate Budget Meeting

Good afternoon. My name is Lori Weeks, or, as I prefer to be referred to, Maddi's Mama. This is my daughter, Madison Charlotte Weeks. Madison was born on June 23, 2006. She was our first child. Through the years Madison grew into a precocious little thing with a brilliant mind and an empathy for people that is rarely seen in a child so young. That empathy pushed her to continuously thank each and every veteran we passed on the street... to raise money for the fight against childhood cancer and to volunteer for the March of Dimes... the organization that helped save her baby sister when she was born prematurely. Like I said, Madison had a brilliant mind and in 2nd grade tested at an end of 5th grade reading, writing, math and science level. We were so proud but not surprised. Madison was a talented dancer and was well-loved by every person she ever had any kind of contact with. Madison was a girl scout, an artist, an animal lover, a big sister, a best friend. She had dreamed of opening a veterinarian's office when she grew up that offered free care to those who could not afford it. On February 19, 2014...on our way to dance class...in the middle of her 6th year of dancing... we hit black ice...I hit black ice... we went off the road. We were ok but in a blink of the eye another motorist, distracted, did not see our vehicle and did not slow down...and hit our car and took the life of our precious Madison. Our lives are irreparably destroyed. In March of 2015, my husband and I prepared to file our taxes. As I walked in I was having trouble breathing... tears were already welled in my eyes... as we sat and reviewed our tax documents I could not stop crying. This would be the last time, on paper...legally... that I could say I am the Mother of two daughters. I finished up this painful process and later that day my husband went to sign our documents. This is when we found out. What we had left... that fleeting moment in time... had been stolen. Madison's identity had been stolen and someone else had claimed her on their taxes. When your child goes on before you... all you have left is their memory...their identity ... and you will tirelessly work to protect it. All I could hear in my head was that I had failed to protect Maddi's life and now I had failed to protect her identity. Our tax preparer offered little assistance, she was kind but completely unaware of what we should do next. We filed a police report with our local police department only for them to treat us like we were crazy for doing so and telling us it was unnecessary. I

spent hours and hours on the phone trying to figure out what to do. I spoke to multiple agencies and multiple representatives within each agency and most of those calls led back to another agent who just couldn't help me. Many encouraged me to file without Maddi on our return so we could get our money. It was NEVER about the money... I had to get Maddi's name back. It's all we have now. So we just kept searching for answers, searching for someone to help us. That is when a friend reached out to me and told me to contact Senator Ayotte's office. From there the ball really got rolling. We were put in contact with the tax advocates office and they were able to see that Maddi's name had been filed at least three times... all of which had been rejected. Despite these attempts to fraudulently claim our child, we were never contacted by any IRS representative to make us aware that this happened. With the help of Senator Ayotte's office and the tax advocate we were able to go through the proper avenues to protect her name further, stop any kind of continuing fraud using her social security number or otherwise and we were able to file our taxes, as family of four, for the very last time. We received our return and then that was it. Nothing to tell us what these disturbed individuals who would raid a deceased child's identity, knew about our daughter. Was it just her social? Did they know anything about her medical history? Do they have personal information about her death? Do we know them? It was quite literally, "Here's your check and be gone with you." After a newspaper article about our family and a few television interviews, we were told the IRS is going to be giving victims access to the fraudulent returns and the information contained within... that was MONTHS ago and we still are no closer to knowing what we must know then we were the day we found out Maddi's identity had been taken. More than 50% of grieving parents, parents whose children passed away before their 13th birthday, will have their child's identity stolen. And many will never even get as far as we have. We are not the rule, we are the exception. And it seems like the bad guys win... in every case... because although we got our daughter's name back we do not know what they know about our daughter... and they will likely never face punishment for the crimes committed against our family. It is time to empower our citizens to protect themselves and their children against these predators and to say enough is enough.

Thank you.