

Statement of
Justin Bruns
8th Grade Student at The Boys' Latin School of Maryland

Before the Senate HELP Committee

Hearing on "Keeping America's Children Safe: Preventing Childhood Injury"

SD-430 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Thursday May 1, 2008, 10 AM

Good Morning, my name is Justin Bruns. I am an eighth grader from Baltimore Maryland. I want to thank Chairman Kennedy, Senator Enzi and other distinguished members of the HELP Committee members for inviting me to testify about this important topic and tell my story of how a helmet saved my life in a snowboarding accident.

This past winter my family and I went to Colorado for President's Day weekend. We went to visit friends and family and go skiing/snowboarding. On Saturday, February 16th I got up early to go snowboarding with my friend Shawn. We were having a great day and the runs were amazing. As the end of the day neared we decided to film ourselves while boarding in the terrain park. My dad came along and offered to film the two of us. It was to be the last run of the day on probably the toughest rail of the day. It was a kinked downhill rail and it was very long. It was a little intimidating and I was a little freaked out. I guess I wasn't leaning forward enough and the board slipped out from under me and I nailed my head on the snow.

I don't remember the fall or going up the rail for that matter. A few minutes later I came to and I was on a backboard with a neckbrace on being taken down the mountain by ski patrol. They took me to the local Medic Center. They did a CT scan and found traces of blood. The doctors decided I needed to go to the hospital in Denver, St. Anthony's. I was admitted to the Trauma unit. I had to stay in the unit for 3 days and 2 nights. I was happy when I finally got released Monday afternoon.

I went back to Baltimore the next day, Tuesday. My parents were really worried about how I was doing/feeling. I had headaches and was tired for the next couple of weeks. I was only allowed to take Tylenol to relieve the pain. My parents told my teachers about my accident. School was helpful and accommodating about how I was feeling. I had trouble with reading and taking notes. Doing both of these almost always gave me a headache in the first couple of weeks after the concussion.

I had to see a couple of doctors over the next 4-5 weeks. I had to stay out of all sports until my doctor in Baltimore said it was okay to play sports. After 7 ½ weeks I was finally told it was okay to play lacrosse. This was the worst time of my life but I am sure glad I had my helmet on. I can't imagine what things would be like for me if I hadn't.

Attachment-- Statement of Kathleen Bruns

On February 16th of this year my husband and I experienced a situation I hope very few parents' ever go through. Our 14 year old son, Justin had a snowboarding accident while boarding with his father and his friend Shawn. Justin took a hard spill off of a rail in a terrain park while boarding in Breckenridge, CO. Bob and I are adamant about helmet use and thankfully for Justin, he had his on.

Justin suffered a stage 3 concussion. This means he was knocked unconscious and had some memory loss. In Justin's case was about 3-5 minutes. This stage is the highest degree of severity. As a result of this injury Justin had to spend 2 nights in the hospital, the first being spent in the trauma unit. The hospital performed CT scans that showed blood, which is one of the reasons they wanted to keep him for 2 nights. The speech pathologist also gave Justin a cognitive test to test his brain function. The first time he took this test he missed passing by just a few points. The hospital decided to follow up with a second test Monday morning, which Justin passed. An MRI was also done Monday. Dr. Nichols, the Neurological Surgeon informed us it was clear and Justin was discharged in the early afternoon.

Justin was told he would have headaches for some time and that he should take it easy. He had to be honest with how he was feeling since there were no clear outward signs of injury. Doctors had told him, if you had broken a bone everyone would immediately know because you would have a cast. In his case there was no outward sign to let others know what had happened.

We contacted Justin's teachers at school to let them know what had happened. We made it clear to them the symptoms that would be troubling Justin. The biggest indicator in his recovery was going to be how he was doing cognitively. Was he able to read, study, complete homework and class assignments and take tests. The first couple of weeks after the concussion Justin only went to school for about 4.5 hrs because he tired very easily and developed regular headaches. He was given some leeway by teachers, who allowed him to skip on some of the class work. Within about 3 weeks after the concussion Justin was reporting that he was headache free. By the end of the third week Justin was able to start exerting some energy on the elliptical at home for 15-20 minutes. Dr. Andy Tucker, our doctor in Baltimore, allowed Justin to slowly increase his workouts over the next 3 weeks. On the school/cognitive front, by the 6th week after the accident Justin was finally caught up on all assignments and tests.

During the time, immediately after the head trauma, Justin was not allowed to participate in any physical activities. He was not even allowed to be in the same vicinity as kids who were playing catch with a football, playing basketball, or roughhousing in any way. He was not allowed to risk having any kind of trauma to his head, so soon after the accident, or it could have very disastrous repercussions to the level his brain function. As

a member of 2 lacrosse teams he was not even to be near the field to watch his teams practice for fear of an errant ball coming his way and hitting him in the head.

It took 7 ½ weeks for Justin to be cleared for full contact physical activity. This seemed like much longer to all of us and was very difficult to get through. Justin will continue with the activities he has always done, but with a greater understanding of how a \$70 helmet kept him “the Justin we know and love”. His helmet truly saved his life!