

**TESTIMONY OF JEFF BINKLEY BEFORE THE OVERSIGHT SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE US HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE**

**SEPTEMBER 19, 2019**

Chairman Lewis, Ranking Member Kelly, Members of the Committee. I'm Jeff Binkley from Atlanta, Georgia. I appreciate the opportunity to be here today and testify regarding this important matter. The story I will relate is one that our family never expected to tell. Yet is one we must tell.

On November 2, 2018, my daughter Maura Binkley, an Atlanta native and then a 21 year-old Senior at Florida State University lost her life in a shooting at a Tallahassee yoga studio. Also lost was Florida State Medical School Professor, Dr. Nancy Van Vesse. Four other women were wounded. The shooter was a misogynist and member of the incel subculture, with a long history of abusive and criminal behavior toward women. This was a premeditated crime, with the Tallahassee Police Department concluding at the end of a comprehensive and thorough investigation that the motive was hatred toward women. A hate crime. The victims were targeted for no other reason than being women.

The Tallahassee shooter (whose name I will never repeat) openly expressed his admiration of other misogynist killers such as the perpetrator of the Isla Vista/UC Santa Barbara shooting, who is referred to as a "Saint" in incel/misogynist online forums. For those of you who may not be familiar with the term incel, it is used to describe an "involuntary celibate."

My vocabulary is inadequate to fully describe the impact of the crime committed on our family, Maura's friends, the communities of Florida State University, Tallahassee and our City of Dunwoody in Metro Atlanta. Though please understand that the pain, the sense of loss, the constant awareness of a future foregone is with us every minute, every hour, every day, every week, every month...and will be every year. And understand that every hate crime not only impacts families and communities but also undermines the basic values of our society.

Our Maura...always smiling, approached life with a focus on, and belief in, her responsibility toward her sisters and brothers. When we gathered with Maura's Tri Delta Sisters and other friends on campus in Tallahassee after the tragedy, so many expressed to us how she had literally changed their lives with her expressions of love toward them. Because to Maura we are all sisters and brothers. To her, and to her legacy, there was...there is...no "other."

Maura was set to graduate in May of this year. We learned after her loss that she had been accepted into the Fulbright Fellowship program and would...no should...be teaching now in Germany. Her plans were to then attend graduate school in International Relations and pursue a career as a diplomat. Ever seeking to bring people--all sisters and brothers--together.

No evil act arising from the darkness and perpetrated by the hands of hate can ever extinguish Maura's light, Dr. Van Vesseem's light and the light of all the other victims of hate crimes from Orlando, from Pittsburgh, from El Paso and all the other communities victimized. Yet, that is exactly what individuals consumed by hatred and those who work to incite them seek to do.

I spoke of Maura's sense of responsibility, based in love, toward all. I can hear Maura's voice. I hope you can too. She's telling us, "We must all share this sense and the actions of our body politic must reflect it. If so, then we will experience the reality of that beautiful line, 'Only love can conquer hate.'"

Thank you.