Tia Rustici (Boise, Idaho)

I want to thank [Senator] Grassley for the opportunity to be here for today. My name is Tia. I'm here today because my daughter, Kielee, cannot be.

Kylie was only 23 years old when she lost her life from kratom. She started taking botanical kratom to manage her pain from EDS and POTS. She wanted to avoid prescriptions, so she began to search for a natural solution.

She found botanical kratom, and like many others, she thought it was safe because it's marketed that way. It's “natural” and it's sold in gas stations.

She was wrong.

Before kratom entered Kielee’s life, she was studying to be a forensic accountant. She was a top employee at her job. She had many friends. She was beautiful, smart and full of life. She had a smile that could light up a room. She had big goals, and she fought hard for what she believed in.

Then we began to see a change. She dropped out of school. She became isolated from her family and friends. She lost weight. She became combative and irritable, and eventually she lost her job. We didn't know that the changes we were seeing could be [attributed] to a problem with kratom.

Then on March 1st, 2025, we lost her. Because she was so young, they had to do a full death investigation. Acute mitragynine intoxication is what I have to read on her death certificate. Something that is sold in the gas station next to the candy bars, something that's marketed as safe is what destroyed my daughter.

Kielee was not using street drugs. She was not drinking alcohol. Most importantly, she was not using 7-OH or synthetics. She was using powder kratom.

That is why we cannot only focus on 7-OH if we want to protect people. The conversation must also involve kratom and its natural compounds, mitragynine. Something that [binds to] opioid receptors shouldn't be available to kids in gas stations.

I cannot bring my daughter back, but if telling her story can help save another parent from being where I am, I will never stop talking.