

February 27, 2018

Hello. Thank you for the opportunity to tell my story in support of House Bill 147. My name is Demeisha Burns, and I live in Bastrop, Texas.

The reason I support this bill is because it would change state law to make information available when families are trying to get answers when their loved ones die in custody. That's all I wanted in my case... to know what happened.

On June 19th, 2017, my 21-year-old son, Herman Titus, died in his cell in the Travis County Jail. Because the Sheriff's Office delayed releasing details about my son's death by using this law to deny public information requests, my lawyer dropped my case.

I was left without any answers until investigative journalists with KXAN-TV stepped in and discovered what led up to my son's death. They uncovered surveillance video, taped interviews with law enforcement and other inmates, and other records that showed my son had been complaining to jail staff for weeks about severe pain following a major car wreck at the time of his arrest. KXAN found proof that my son went to get medical attention the day he died – only to be sent back to his cell, where he collapsed.

I believe this law prevents families from completely understanding if something could have been done to save their loved ones' lives. When something like this happens unexpectedly, you have so many questions. Without answers, it makes law enforcement look guilty even if they've done nothing wrong... like they have something to hide. It also forces families to spend money and find legal representation to dig for the truth.

I feel like my family has been a victim of this law. We can't grieve properly, and we have no closure. I feel like, just because my son was incarcerated, his health concerns weren't taken seriously. He was a person, just like you and me. He had people who loved him. He didn't deserve to die.

I'm not giving up, and I urge you to remember the name "Herman Titus" when you're considering fixing this law. Thank you for your time. I'm happy to answer any questions.

Demeisha Burns