John,

Can I add to this that I was recently called by my daughter's boyfriend to come over. She had been crying since she got home from work and he'd NEVER seen her like this. When I arrived, she'd been sobbing for almost an hour. The sheet on the bed was completely soaked and the first thing she said to me is "this has to stop".

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From: **Leigh Bardell**
Date: Tue, Aug 20, 2013 at 8:14 PM
Subject: Written Testimony
To: "Lazet, John (AG)" <LazetJ@michigan.gov>

Because of the actions of Matthew Scott Bentley, I am not and never will be the same person I was who had a carefree outlook on life. I have become a very private person who finds it hard to get close to people. I have become very bitter about life. I have an extremely difficult time trusting anyone when before my first inclination was to give people the benefit of the doubt.

It was extremely difficult in the first few days watching my dad struggle. He couldn't inhabit his own home for weeks until the clean-up was complete. And when he could, it was extremely difficult to be there every day with the memory of my mom lying in the doorway of the living room where he found her. When he knew he was sick - rather than fight the disease, he gave up and let it take him. Imagine the guilt he lived with for 5½ years knowing that his wife of almost 37 years was killed with a handgun that belonged to him. Imagine the guilt he felt knowing that his children lost their mother because he may not have locked the front door when he left to return to work after having lunch with my mother - allowing a stranger to enter their home and take her life. Imagine the void in his life after 37 years with the woman he loved. He had essentially given up on living. He had nothing left to live for. By the time he got to a doctor, he only had two weeks left.

After my mom's death, I did everything I could to continue to have a "normal" life for myself and my daughters. That was the most impossible goal I had ever set for myself. For months, it was a struggle for me to be able to get out of bed on a daily basis and go to work. I spent the next two years crying all the way home EVERY day during my commute of 45 minute. I was emotionally and mentally exhausted by the time I go home. After dragging myself to work every day, I often didn't have the

energy in the evenings or weekends to do anything else. In fact, most weekends for close to a year, I spent at least one day in bed because I was physically and mentally unable to function. There was also a period of two weeks where all I could do was get up, get dressed, sit on the couch, and wait to go to bed again. My children did not have a mother who could be involved in their daily lives like she should have been. By the time I got through my daily responsibilities, I didn't and sometimes still don't have the energy for friends, hobbies, or involvement in "life". This continues to happen from time to time – sometimes just for a day and sometimes for a few days depending upon what type of developments/actions there have been related to Matt Bentley.

I had so much anxiety and stress that I couldn't sleep without being medicated. And no matter to what extent I was medicated, nothing made the nightmares go away. They were so horrible and real, even to remember some of them now causes great distress. They were so horrible, that even though I can remember some of them in vivid detail, I have never been able to talk to anyone about them. I continue to go through periods of sleeplessness and nightmares.

During these early times, it was my then 13-year-old daughter who carried the burden of keeping the family going and doing as much as she could manage. This was not what she should have been doing at that age. She also struggled with how someone her age could commit such a horrible crime against someone's mother and grandmother.

For years we dealt with my youngest daughter (who was 9 at the time of my mom's murder) having nightmares and fears of being alone in the dark causing her to be awake most of the night and exhausted during the daytime hours. Her screams in the middle of the night were the worst sound I've ever heard. In the warmer months when we had the windows open, the screams would wake neighbors from a sound sleep. It was always the same nightmare – that "he" was coming in through her second-floor bedroom window to kill her. Some nights, it would take me hours to get her calmed down enough so that we could both try to get back to sleep. The end result was that we eventually screwed her bedroom window shut. The nightmares subsided but did not go away entirely for some time. Since the US Supreme Court ruling, this daughter has been having nightmares and difficulty sleeping again. She is also hyper-vigilant and on alert while walking to/from her car – on the lookout for "him" and afraid. At home, the doors and windows are closed and locked for fear

that "he" might show up. As a result, she is now back in therapy. She wasn't able to return to college for the spring semester and has recently had to cut her work hours back. In May she was on FMLA leave for a period of 3 weeks.

My youngest daughter also went through a period of time where she was cutting herself and could never explain why. Her therapist told me that it was directly related to the PTSD the resulted from her grandmother's murder. She also suffers from memory and concentration related issues.

My oldest daughter suffers from PTSD as well. Her issues are related to anxiety, memory and concentration. PTSD led both of my daughters to become involved in very risky behaviors and to seek love where they shouldn't have – in relationships where they would be treated as objects and not as someone with true feelings. They were trying to remove themselves from life where it hurt too much. We learned from counselors that it's not something they could control – much like being an alcoholic.

My daughters and I continue to suffer from PTSD flare ups. One of the most prominent, continuing symptoms for me is an exaggerated startle response. Prior to September 2, 1997, try as they might, my children could not sneak up on me and scare me. After that day, they couldn't do enough NOT to. It could sometimes take hours for me to settle back down. Any loud, sudden, unexpected noise had that impact on me for years and I thought it was been subsiding. As recently as a couple of years ago, after being in contact with a filmmaker about a documentary to include Mr. Bentley, I had an incident where there was what sounded like gunshots in our neighborhood . . . . more likely it was fireworks. I was instantly hysterical and crying to the point of being close to hyperventilating. It was a Sunday evening and I couldn't sleep for two nights. I almost could not go to work on Monday. It was Thursday before I was settled down. Only after I had checked police logs and checked in with the police officer who lives across the street and learned that there was no criminal activity. A few weeks after that at work, there was a loud crack of thunder just before lunch. It took me until the end of the day to be relaxed - with multiple trips to the restroom because I couldn't stop the tears.

I was 'dismissed' by a massage therapist who, after 6 months of weekly treatments, could not manage to get the tension knots from anxiety worked out of my muscles. She refused to provide further treatments because she couldn't justify charging me for a service that was ineffective. Related to that, I was prescribed muscle relaxants that often had little effect. I was also prescribed Percocet and Vicodin for the pain.

Over the years, I suffered from many health issues due to the anxiety and stress. I had skin conditions related to the stress. I have nervous disorders now related to the anxiety. Most recently, after being contacted by again about a documentary, I suffered severe muscle spasms and pain from tension and stress. After six months of chiropractic care, massage therapy, physical therapy, muscle relaxants, and anxiety medications I am finally feeling daily relief.

I once had someone tell me that it was too hard to be around me and to spend time with me. It wasn't because of the way I acted or things I said. She didn't know what to say or how to act because she didn't want to hurt my feelings or say something that I would think was completely thoughtless. She felt guilty because her life was good. She saw her mother frequently and talked to her every day. She also said that it brought to her the reality that none of us are immune to unexpected tragedies in our lives. She realized that something like this, because it was so unprovoked and random, could happen to her and her family. She couldn't handle seeing me and having to face that reality; therefore, it was easier and more pleasant for her to simply avoid me. This was the case with many people – friends and acquaintances. Being in my presence was too difficult for them to deal with. I lost some good friends because of Matt Bentley's actions.

My ex-husband had a hard time adjusting to the situation. Within a few weeks of my mother's murder, he expected my daughters and me to bounce back and be the same fun, carefree people we had been. He never could adjust to who we ended up being. He attempted to make things work by telling my two daughters not to "upset" me – which to him meant do not mention the whole terrible tragedy to me because I might cry. My girls spent years feeling like they couldn't talk to me about their feelings and what they were dealing with. This resulted in both of them needing some extensive counseling. It also resulted in our relationships not being as close as they should have been during the time we needed to mend our hearts. We sometimes still have trouble talking about it. Because of my former husband's inability to deal with our situation productively and be a support system for us, our marriage failed.

As a result of Mr. Bentley's actions I have lost friends, acquaintances, affiliations, and a marriage because people didn't (and still don't) know how to treat me or behave around me - it was much easier and less uncomfortable for them to simply avoid me and remove me from their lives. I have learned to be very careful about sharing too much of my life with new people for the same reason. I have learned

that some people then look at me differently.

When he was sentenced 15 years ago and all appeals finally exhausted, we felt like we would get some relief from the awful nightmare of our lives that was periodically being brought to the forefront. We thought the reopening of the wound was finished and it could finally scar over without being scratched open again. Events take place on a frequent basis that cause the PTSD we each suffer to show itself in one way or another. We all had extensive counseling for many behaviors related to the PTSD.

Since the US Supreme Court ruling, I have had to go back on anxiety and anti-depression medications after being med free for 9 years. I am back to sleepless nights and nightmares. In the last year, my daughters and I have all needed further counseling. There is no rest. There is no peace. When we think we are past all the appeals and requests for release and are at a "safe" place where we can settle into a peaceful, calm existence, there is another development. When we think the healing and scarring over has begun, someone comes along and rips the scabs off! There has been no chance for healing for my mother's family nor will there be until these things are put to rest and the final decision is left to stand.

Both of my daughters have recently expressed a strong need for the roller coaster to stop. I couldn't agree with them more.