My name is Lauren Deluca. I am a 36yr old Commercial Insurance Agency for middle market and large business in the clinical trials and the life science industry; living in Worcester, Massachusetts.

In January 2017 I was planning for my future; which including paying off my credit cards, saving money for a house and was excitedly planning to start a family. I was in process of fertility testing so I could move forward with receiving infertility treatments as my OBGYN found I was showing signs of early menopause. In May 2017 I finally had my first appointment coming up to begin infertility treatment however all this changed on May 17th when I went into Acute Pancreatic Attack. A week prior a new Gastroenterologist confirmed I suffered from a condition called Chronic Pancreatitis.

I had not yet realized what that diagnosis would so quickly and devastatingly effect my life. I knew it was a “bad” diagnosis but I been in a moderate and increasingly more intense pain over the course of the prior 2 years as I was seeking answers for all the gastric pain I was experiencing. I thought now that I had a new Gastroenterologist who identified what was “wrong” with me I could at least make the necessary dietary changes and finally quit smoking like I always said I would but overall things would be ok.

On May 17, 2017 everything changed. I went into an Acute Pancreatic Attack. I went to the emergency room where they provided IV fluid, Zofran and Dilated pain medication as per protocol for treating individuals who are in an acute pancreatic attack. Pain management and reducing the pancreatic flare quickly are vitally important to stop the pancreatic enzymes’ from continuing to digest the pancreas itself. The emergency room advised since I had a chronic illness they were unable to admit me into the hospital to treat me for the acute pancreatic attack and advised for me to follow up with my Gastroenterologist for help. When I reached out to my physician I was immediately dismissed as a “pill seeker” which lead me on a chase to get even basic healthcare for my illness.

I desperately made phone calls every day trying to get myself help through my health insurance carriers member services and to multiple physicians and pain clinics to get assistance for my attack and was turned away at every corner. I reached out to the National Pancreatic Foundation who advised they were not taking a stance as they would let the law dictate what happens to patients. I called legislators offices and left multiple messages about my plight.

In September 2017 my healthcare advocate found a new Gastroenterologist who re-tested my pancreatic function and his findings confirm I lost 11% of my organ function from the May 5, 2017 to September 20, 2017.

Numerous medications were immediately changed and I was provided new medications which included 5mg of oxycodone. The changes in medications, in particular, the relief provided by the opioid medication allowed balance to be restored in my body and I slowly started to recover. My appetite improved and I was able to eat more often with much less pain which promoted weight gain. The additional nutrition even gave me the strength to start doing light yoga as I wanted to keep my body in even better health than I previously had; as I had a whole new appreciation for health after the experiences I went through over the summer.

After a short period, my prescriptions were stopped. All physicians directly cited the CDC Guidelines as the reasoning for not providing opioid medication and stating that they are too fearful to lose their medical licenses and to face criminal charges if their patient does something illegal with their medications. Although I respect that we have an opioid crisis this is misleading as we have a heroin and illegally obtained fentanyl crisis and even if it were in fact a crisis taking medication from patients who truly rely on it to live any semblance of a quality of life that is not curled up, screaming in pain will resolve nothing. This will only perpetuate the crisis with individuals with serious illnesses and conditions seeking relief of their symptoms on the street or worse yet, people choosing to take their own lives to end the ruthless pain they endure every second of every day. I would like you to image just for a minute what it must take to bring yourself to that point. To decide that life really is “too painful” and death is a better option that individual must have gone through the worse and longest physical and mental stress to come to such a decision. I cannot imagine the horror that person was subjected to but that is what people, American Citizens, Voters are facing right now! I want to live to again! I want to leave the house with the man I love and talk a walk in the sunshine together! I want to spend time with my friends and family and keep my job! I want my life back. I can have all these things and more if I could get the medical care I need. Why do I have to go to such a length to get help? And what can I ask you about the millions of people out there that don’t know how or don’t get themselves the help they need? Do they just suffer? The cruelty of this is unheard of.

It is critical for legal protections be expanded regarding federal exemptions for opioid prescribing beyond just cancer and hospice. In addition, we need to have physicians and actual patients involved in legislation regarding opioid medications. The only individuals qualified to dictate our care is our individual doctors. Each person is unique and our illnesses are unique as well. The doctors need to be able to do the job that they have been trained for and are qualified to do, and to do so without fear or the patients health will always be compromised.

Individuals afflicted with these conditions have another valuable insight regarding the one thing doctors cannot ever truly understand; and that is actual life experience of living with the pain that comes from these conditions. Unfortunately, no amount of training in the world can make another person understand what true intractable pain is; as it is only understood if you experience this. The idea of never ending pain seems unfathomable but I am here to tell you it is not. It is, in fact, quite real and it’s about to be a terrifying reality for millions of individuals who have broken no laws and simply have the misfortune of having a condition science has not yet found a cure and that these afflictions cause us great pain; all the while during a time there is great political pressure to act swiftly and decisively with ridding the country of the opioid crisis. This is not a quick war for any side of this battle. These are the things for later discussions but for now I leave you with this.

I am a direct result of what happens when doctors fear doing their jobs and need to answer to quotas and are benchmarked against each other like we are some sort of balance sheet. I was refused the appropriate care I needed during an acute attack, as every doctor was too fearful of the opioid crisis and the government oversight, so instead of treating me as medically necessary I was passed around from doctor to doctor like a game of kids playing “Not It!” with my life!

I lost 11% of my organ function while being passed off and avoided by doctors. I had to step down from my job due to my inability to eat causing major issues with my ability to continue to make it to work. Mind you, this was a job I worked very hard for and that I love very much! Due to my inability to get proper care for my illness I am being forced into disability and to take money from the government rather than remain a contributing member of society.

I am not sure if I will be able to have a baby now as a result of the damages I have sustained. This is a hurt you cannot imagine!! Not only did I suffer a physical pain no human should have to endure but for my chances to have a baby to be taken from me is a hurt that cuts deeper than any other thing that has been or could be done to me!

I leave you with this. Please do what you would want done if you were bleeding, suffering and in desperate need of compassion. I have gone through suffering I never knew the human body could endure mere months ago and there are millions who have been through even more than me. This is bigger than me, this is bigger than you, this is a moral duty to mankind.