



PETITION TO INCREASE FEDERAL FUNDING FOR CHILDHOOD CANCER RESEARCH

Kaelon Whittington was diagnosed on April 10th, 2021 with Acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL) at the age of 12 years old. ALL is the most common childhood cancer. It occurs when a bone marrow cell develops errors in its DNA. It is classified by the type of WBC (white blood cells) affected and the genetic abnormalities that occur. There are no tests to detect this type of cancer early, which is why it is critical to pay attention to your body for any possible symptoms. Symptoms may include enlarged lymph nodes, bruising, fever, bone pain, bleeding

on or around the gums, and frequent infections. The estimated new cases of ALL in 2022 are 6,600 and out of those diagnosed, 1,560 will die. Children who were treated for cancer are far more likely to suffer chronic health conditions later in life versus those without a history of cancer.

Kaelon began experiencing random pains throughout his body accompanied with fever for 3 months. We took him to the ER twice and also to his pediatrician on three occasions. It took that amount of time to finally get a diagnosis. Hearing the word cancer was something we were not prepared for. You are instantly terrified and begin fearing the worst. Upon diagnosis, we spent the next 47 days in the hospital with our son. The money we had to spend for meals, gas and parking alone was astounding to say the least. I was driving 80 miles to and from work daily. I am the sole provider of our family as my husband suffers from Muscular Dystrophy and is unable to work. I have to work 2 jobs just to stay afloat. Unfortunately, there is no financial support available in the state of Texas where we live. To even qualify for SSI for your child you cannot have more than \$1,000.00 in your banking account at any time. It has been a very difficult situation to be in financially on top of the emotional stress we have suffered.

Our son has gone through so much mentally along with physically. Since he has been in isolation for most of his journey so far, he has suffered depression which leaves him feeling helpless, scared and alone. Sadly, there is nothing his father or I can say or do to take that away from him. We do our very best to comfort and console Kaelon as much as we possibly can. I also suffer from depression as well as anxiety since our son's diagnosis. Most days I am mentally exhausted but I know I have to be strong for our son. The most important thing to me is not to ever let Kaelon see me in a state of sadness or stress. He is going through enough because of this awful disease.

Kaelon receives treatments at MD Anderson and is currently in the maintenance phase of his cancer treatments. Maintenance therapy is the treatment of cancer with medication, typically following an initial round of treatment. This can include hormonal therapy, chemotherapy or targeted therapy. Depending on the drug or combination of drugs, each treatment can last a few hours or a few days. The doctors at MD Anderson have given our son the best of care. However, I feel that with the advancement of medicine there should be better options for other types of treatment available. This is just one of the many reasons I am so passionate about doing all I can to help raise awareness on childhood cancer. We must be a voice for our children so that they can be heard.

Each year, more than 17,000 children are diagnosed with cancer in the United States. Globally, it is estimated that 400,000 new cases of cancer affect children each year. This amount does not include the large numbers of undiagnosed cases. The number of diagnosed cases annually has not declined in nearly 20 years. Cancer is the leading cause of death by disease in children, resulting in the death of approximately 1,800 kids each year. After accidents, cancer continues to be the second leading cause of death in children under age 15. Despite these facts, childhood cancer research is commonly underfunded.

The federal government is allocating a meager 4% for funding for childhood cancer research. It is key that we do all we can to see that percentage rise to 8%. By signing this petition, you will help facilitate lobbying and the advance of a healthcare policy that will delegate a higher percentage of resources for childhood cancer research. This will give researchers more funding to possibly find a vaccine for childhood cancer which could potentially mean less time these children will have to fight cancer and undergo such agonizing treatments. We need 12 million signatures to take the next step in this process. Please help us be the voice of all these children fighting such a horrific disease by signing and sharing this petition.

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