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March 15, 2021

Dear AMTA Community,

I am writing to you today with incredibly sad news. On March 10, 2021, Mr. Michael "Ryan" Wood, a first-year student and mock trial competitor at Furman University in Greenville, South Carolina, died unexpectedly. On behalf of the entire American Mock Trial Association community, we mourn Ryan's loss and send our condolences to his family, friends, and the entire Furman Mock Trial and Furman University community.

Ryan loved mock trial; it was his activity. He relished the intellectual back-and-forth, loved finding ways to neutralize innovative case theories advanced by opposing counsel, and enjoyed delivering cross examination. Ryan's teammates describe him as a utility player who portrayed character and fact witnesses and possessed the ability to cry real tears on command, which was made even more compelling by his imposing physical stature. In addition to Ryan's year on the AMTA circuit, his distinguished mock trial history includes a successful high school career, three South Carolina High School championships, and a fifth-place finish at the 2019 National High School Championship. Ryan's Paladin teammates remember him for his sterling character, unparalleled professionalism, unimpeachable integrity, and unflinching loyalty that outweigh even his formidable mock trial skills. Mr. Wood truly embodied the Spirit of AMTA, and we grieve with the Furman Mock Trial community at the passing of a gentle giant, and in the words of his coach, "a special and beloved denizen of Midlands."

Furman University will remember Ryan at a community ceremony on Tuesday, March 16, 2021, and a visitation and funeral will be held on Wednesday, March 17, 2021 at noon in Ryan's hometown of Edgefield, South Carolina. AMTA asks that the privacy of Ryan, his family, and the Furman Mock Trial family be respected during this incredibly difficult time of grieving.

The AMTA community is so strong and vibrant because of the wonderful contributions of students like Ryan who pour their heart into Midlands. And although we are joined by more new programs and teams every year, there is no doubt that our bond grows closer. This is a special community, and Ryan was a special part of the AMTA family. We may come from different programs, but right now, we are all Paladins as we grieve for and support Ryan's family, loved ones, and friends.

Sincerely,

Brandon D. Harper | President, American Mock Trial Association