

**Testimony of  
LaCrisha Rose, Parent  
Hearing on “Strengthening Prevention and Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect”**

**U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Education and Labor  
Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Human Services  
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Good afternoon, Madam Chair Bonamici, Ranking Member Comer, and members of the committee. Thank you for the invitation to be here today. My name is LaCrisha Rose. I currently reside in Cabin Creek WV with my husband and three children Remington, Sawyer and Meadow. I work for TEAM for WV Children facilitating a network of peer to peer mutual self help groups using the Circle of Parents model. I would like to share a glimpse of my story in hopes for helping you understand what the re-authorization of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act means for families like mine.

I want to start by asking you a few questions. Have you ever felt overwhelmed? Have you ever wished that someone would sit down with you and help you to be a better parent? That is exactly what I wished for when I became a parent and found myself walking down the same path that my parents, and many of you, have walked down. Growing up my family struggled. My parents worked hard to provide us with the best life that they could, with the resources they had. Life for my family was good until one day my father came home from the mine and handed my mother a pink slip and at the very same time she handed him a positive pregnancy test. With no job and a baby on the way, things became tough. The instability of employment of the mining industry caused a roller coaster effect on our lives.

The more challenges we had, the more responsibility I took on as a big sister. I helped wipe away my little brother’s tears and looked after him, but over the years keeping him safe took on new meaning. Sometimes keeping him safe meant taking the blame for something that he did or didn’t do, so I would take a whipping instead of both of us. Other times keeping him safe meant us crawling out my bedroom window and visiting my grandparents’ house next door, so that he wouldn’t hear all the yelling in the next room. No matter what, keeping my little brother safe was my top priority. Life was hard for us, but my parents loved us and did the best they could with the tools they had.

Today families continue to struggle with various challenges, but community based programming helps families to have options so making positive parenting choices becomes easier when facing adversity.

In August 2008 my now husband and I were about to welcome the first great grandchild from my generation into our family. Life was good for our little family until my husband brought home a pink slip from the mines, and I was headed down the same path my parents had walked down before. With no income and a baby at home, we struggled. Like many other families, when it came to disciplining our son I repeated the same technique that my parents used to discipline me. The more I spanked my son, the worse his behavior became. As I laid in the bed at night crying, I finally understood from a parent's perspective what my father meant when he would say "This is going hurt to me more than it hurts you." I felt so alone.

One day I saw an ad in the newspaper advertising a playgroup at The Starting Points Family Resource center at our local elementary school. I really enjoyed learning about my son's healthy brain development. The director of the center extended an invitation for me to participate in the Parents as Teachers Home Visitation Program, and I politely declined. I didn't know her that well and I wasn't fond of the idea of someone coming into my personal space and being judgmental. In addition to attending playgroups, I started attending a peer group on Fridays. This helped my child with separation and attachment and allowed me to discuss the challenges and successes surrounding parenting over a cup of coffee. Once again, I was encouraged to participate in the Parents as Teachers Program from my peers and decided to give it a try. I polished my home from top to bottom in preparation for my home visitor's arrival. Our first visit mirrored playgroup, but was tailored to the individual needs of our family. Building a trusting relationship with my home visitor over time gave me the confidence to reach out for help with my concerns surrounding the discipline of our son. I knew there was a chance that my home visitor may have to call Child Protective Services but I was scared, alone and willing to take the chance for help. I know now that I was nowhere near a Child Protective Services call, but I was afraid at the time.

My experience with my home visitor was nothing less than phenomenal. The way my home visitor responded was everything I could have hoped for and more. It was as if I had asked a neighbor for a cup of sugar. She armed me with dozens of positive discipline options. She encouraged "time in" versus "time out", connection instead of correction, and how to use a positive rewards chart to point out his strengths. It was so simple, yet it had never occurred to me. She explained it to me as if it were like a toolbox. Not all tools were universal and I would have to try different tools depending on the situation or behavior. She also helped me understand how my temperament could influence the effect of outcomes. My parents and in-laws participated in home visits as well. It was nice seeing the grandparent toolbox come to life. I continued to fill my toolbox with all the possible tools that I might need to use in the

future. As I started to dig deeper, I learned that the Strengthening Families Protective Factor Framework was at the root of every tool in my toolbox and all the community based programs that had helped our family. It was nice focus on strengths for a change. This sparked a fire inside of me.

In 2012 the director of the Starting Points Family Resource Center asked me to accompany her to a workshop to pilot a program called “Circle of Parents.” The Circle of Parents was much like the peer group that I attended Fridays. During a group exercise, I was asked to play the role of a parent who had lost custody of her child due to using harsh physical punishment as a means of discipline. It was then that I came face to face with what could have been my life had I not chosen to reach out for help. It hit me like a ton of bricks. The only difference in the outcome of my former self and the role play parent was PREVENTION. (Community Based Programming using the Strengthening Families Protective Factor Framework to prevent child abuse and neglect.)

After that experience I decided it was time to pay it forward. I realized that society as a whole had a responsibility to help other parents like me, and I wanted to be part of that. One year after that workshop, I became a home visitor for the Parents as Teachers Program. I started taking on bigger roles to help shape policies affecting local families. I began taking evidence-based training in programs such as Triple P (*Positive Parenting Program*) and in 2015 I was asked to facilitate the West Virginia Circle of Parents State Network. My favorite personal achievement was becoming certified in the national training of *Bringing the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework to Life in Your Work*, after being nominated to join the Alliance National Parent Partnership Council. Being a part of the council has helped me understand the bigger picture of prevention and how policy can affect change for the future of our nation’s children. I currently serve as a co-chair of the council and have a seat as a board member for the National Alliance of Children’s Trust and Prevention Funds. This snowball effect has led me here today.

Although I wish I were a perfect parent, I feel comfortable saying that I am a much better parent today than I was in 2008. I have to work on building the protective factors every day. There are several instances throughout my life when throwing in the towel might have been easier. I can definitely understand why some folks are drawn to the dark side to sometimes make poor decisions. One of the hardest times for our family was the loss of our daughter, Liberty. Tragically, she passed in utero due to medical complications before we ever had the chance to know her. It would have been very easy to let that kind of pain tear our family apart and possibly make me neglect our family. Instead we chose to completely rebuild resilience,

rely on concrete supports, social connections and talk about feelings with our children to make our family stronger.

**Some of the things I have learned since reaching out for help are...**

- ... If the only tool in your toolbox is a hammer, everything looks like a nail!
- ... The Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework saved my life.
- ... When faced with the exact same challenge as my parents with pink slip from the mines while awaiting the birth of our second child, I had support and toolbox full of resources.
- ... PREVENTION MATTERS and it can benefit all families
- ... Currently, Congress invests about \$.53 per child<sup>1</sup> in prevention supports each year for my children and others across the country. This is wonderful, but we can do better so that other children and families can gain the benefits that my family achieved.

**My hopes for action upon my departure here today are that...**

- ... Something I have said here today sticks with you in recognizing the importance in considering increasing the resources available to all families throughout the country.
- ... In the future you hear more testimonies with happy endings because of prevention efforts that you have helped create and support.
- ... That one day, my children will stand before you thanking you for listening to their mother's story and share how much richer the lives of their children are because of the decisions that you made in the next coming days.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to speak to you today about what I believe helps build strong families-yours, mine and all the families across the nation!

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<sup>1</sup> This calculation is based on US Census Bureau estimates that there are 73,939,840 children in the United States. Meanwhile, the total CBCAP appropriation for last year was \$39 million. This equates to \$0.53 per child across the nation. Source: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US#>