

Subject:

The Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties invites you to testify at a hearing on “The Neglected Epidemic of Missing BIPOC Women and Girls”.

Response:

It is with great displeasure to speak on such a topic as this; however the magnitude of this specific topic has become a major part of our families being. There is not a day that goes by without conversation on the subject of our daughters / grandsons on going case. How do you wrap your mind around the facts of Akia’s and baby’s disappearance, domestic violence case and subsequent murder investigation in the same breath? From the beginning the family was in awe of the news and had no clue what to do in such a matter. Report her missing to the police is the natural thing to do right? Let’s have a search party right? Let’s report it to the media right? These are all the things you would see on a TV Show like Law and Order! It’s unfortunate that all of these things don’t work exactly like TV shows.

The epidemic of missing persons of color is not a new topic but one that has been dismissed because society does not care about us. This is a trickle effect that has come down through this country’s history. *Only time has brought us to this point of actually acknowledging the disparities that exist.*

As a Retired Veteran of the United States Marine Corps; three tours in Iraq who gave all to my country with every regard to protect her with my life I stand broken at the thought of not being able to receive the help for my daughter when needed. Also to include that having PTSD further heightens my emotional and physical being. This episode has intensified my ability not to sleep like others.

Support for Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC) is needed now! We are important and deserve the same attention as Caucasian people. I have exhausted everything that has been asked of me to do and I still feel that nothing has been accomplished. I try to understand why her case is so secretive and only want to know what happened and where is she. Parents are not supposed to outlive their children but live to see all that is accomplished in their life. That will never happen and in some regards the justice system took almost five years to figure out what we all knew.

Communication:

The ability to communicate with the police has been very difficult to say the least. Multiple phone calls with no response for weeks even up to a month, being on hold for countless minutes at a time just to be told the detective on the case is not available or has moved to another office. Talking to several officers at the Police Desk and then being hung up just intensifies who picks up the phone next. Handing out flyers in the community and beat officers do not even know who she is when the local police district is less than two miles away.

Having to write a Congressional Swift to C.A. Dutch Ruppertsberger the U.S. representative for Maryland's 2nd congressional district was the only way to let people know what the family was going through. This led to speaking with the heads of the various Baltimore Police Divisions, the FBI, and meeting with the ADA of Baltimore City has been an experience that will live with our family. But these encounters have not all been a good one. Again, the lack of knowing has been stressful.

The ability to communicate with those who have the authority to provide media coverage was what I thought most ridiculous! Calling or emailing every news station in Baltimore to get coverage did not get the case attention. It made no sense that even after her case was aired on local TV in

Baltimore it only stayed within the confines of the city. It did not get picked up in the neighboring counties, it did not get state, national or international coverage either. Why is this so? My thought only; single black woman with child living in low income neighborhood that is known for drugs and other issues where the police only know the community for being an area of troubled folks who don't care to trust law enforcement anyway. The slogan here snitches dig ditches is well known. A community that stays to themselves is not how cases get solved.

Even though within her case an assailant has been arrested. If you read the letter written used to arrest the individual it details a timeline of her last days. Possibly her resting place is in a landfill in Virginia that covers acres of land. We struggle with not knowing what happened to them, where are they, why can they not search for them, will the evidence in this case put the person or persons in jail for life?

Ways to remedy the problem:

Funding groups that can assist in the help of Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC) is more important now than ever. External Search Teams to include dogs are needed, teams to plaster flyers in the local areas are needed, and extended community activism on the part of local law enforcement needs to be improved or developed.

Monies towards training advocates in the areas of media relations, community relations, cultural relations and family assistance. That a National Standard Operating Process for missing people be provided instead of each level or area of law enforcement having their own. This would also be fundamental in the area media coverage.

In the case of being proactive: Suggested by Akia's aunt Sanobia Wilson an Alert for Pregnant Woman that details their status in case of being missing until found.

I make the comment now that Akia's case is horribly unfortunate but the outcome can be different for the next family. Thanks to Black and Missing for their guidance and critical understanding of how to get the attention that kept Akia's case in the spotlight of law enforcement, media relations and all levels of local, state, and federal government.