

JOINT
SENATE HEALTH & WELFARE COMMITTEE
AND
HOUSE HEALTH & WELFARE COMMITTEE
Friday, February 12, 2016

ATTACHMENT 15

02/12/16
Teri Murrison

Karen Westbrook

From: Teri Murrison [terimurrison@gmail.com]
Sent: Friday, February 12, 2016 11:35 AM
To: Karen Westbrook
Subject: Testimony of Teri Murrison re Foster Care, 2/12/2016

Chairman Heider and Committee Members,

Thank you for this opportunity to submit my last minute written testimony in lieu of being the final speaker in this morning's hearing.

I was not planning to speak, but I have a unique perspective to add to the testimony already heard this morning in support of Representative Perry's draft legislation on foster care. I appreciate being called upon.

My name is Teri Murrison. I am speaking as a private citizen of the great State of Idaho.

In 2004 I was a member of an agricultural leadership program that visited San Quentin Prison as part of a seminar on the development of the criminal mind in general, and serial murderers specifically. We studied criminals such as Ted Bundy, Scott Peterson, and others similarly infamous.

Eric W. Hickey, renown criminal justice professor from Fresno State University (<http://www.fresnostate.edu/socialsciences/criminology/faculty/hickey.html>) assigned us to read his book *Serial Murderers and Their Victims*, 2013, 6th ed., (Thompson-Wadsworth-Cengage Publishers). It's frequently used as a teaching tool in universities and by law enforcement in studying the nature of violence, criminal personalities and victim-offender relationships.

During the visit to San Quentin, Dr. Hickey made a very strong case for the connection between children who fail to securely attach - bond - to their primary caregivers, and the development of adults who have limited capacity to form meaningful relationships. The impacts range from mild to severe. They can be like those Cricket told you about this morning: her life was ruined by others' actions many years ago, but even now her inability to trust and constant state of self-protective vigilance make life very painful. Others become sociopaths like Ted Bundy and go on to commit heinous crimes with no remorse.

Our class toured the many and various levels of security lock up and the death chamber and Dr. Hickey told us that our prisons are full of men and women who do the things they do because of the start they got - good, bad, and horrific. This made a big impression on me, but what happened next, even more so.

He showed us a video that some of you may have seen before. In the old black and white video, a baby monkey is separated from his mother from birth and kept in isolation from humans and other monkeys. He is introduced to a healthy, secure monkey which reaches out to the baby. The baby, in a confined space and unable to get away, shrieks and jumps around the cage as if he is in boiling water. The next scene shows children in a Romanian orphanage. They are rocking back and forth rhythmically in an effort to comfort themselves and self-soothe. The video makes the connection between early rearing practices and their bizarre behavior.

Watching it, I began to cry. Embarrassed, I noticed that I too was rocking.

I spent the next three days researching Romanian children and learned that many of them suffer from a condition that Dr. Hickey hadn't mentioned, Reactive Attachment Disorder. That's the medical term for some children's response to trauma and abandonment. And as I learned more, I recognized many of its symptoms:

failure to trust, failure to establish deep and meaningful relationships, a history of multiple short disrupted relationships in high school, and fear of being known at any level deeper than the surface.

As I looked back at my life and the things I had been told about myself, it all finally made sense. My birth mother gave me up for adoption at birth. She was not married to my birth father and her husband (not my father) wouldn't sign the paperwork for me to be relinquished for some time. At two months old, I had a life threatening medical episode that required lengthy hospitalization. When at 6 months I was finally placed with adoptive parents, my foster mother sent along a note cautioning them not to hold me too much since that would spoil me.

For a brief year I was the joy and sole focus of two very loving parents. For a child who had been deprived of the nurture an infant needs, that must have been wonderful. But then they adopted another child who had seemingly greater needs, and my mother's focus was diverted. She later told me she put me in my crib a lot because I seemed to like to be there. It was a life long pattern that continued through my parents' passing several years ago.

Over the past decade I have come to terms with and learned how to overcome my first tendency to withdraw and not trust. But how many, many children and adults have not? At the macro level, San Quentin is full, as are other prisons. We're running out of room and it's costing us dearly. At the micro level, there are so many of us like Cricket and me who have to make daily conscious decisions to overcome how we learned to deal with the world at an early age.

I believe that we as parents, leaders, and members of society have a moral imperative to address this widespread condition in society. I believe the solution lies in ensuring that all children are able to securely bond with their primary caregivers. Some of those are blood relatives, but many, many others are foster and adoptive parents. Disrupting fragile children engaged in trust-building relationships only compounds the harm. The task is huge, but we have to start by touching the lives we can - the lives you can.

I urge the Committee to hear and support Representative Perry's legislation to help traumatized children who may just be beginning to trust for the first time in their lives.

Thank you so much for this opportunity to tell you in writing what you ran out of time to hear this morning. You have a very difficult job and I appreciate each and every one of you.

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