

*Joanne Shenandoah:*

We will now proceed to the scheduled public witness testimony and the public has been provided an opportunity to register to provide public testimony. During the register process, each member of the public who wanted to provide oral public testimony was given an option to select to provide the public testimony today or during tomorrow's segment of this public hearing. A reminder that the oral public testimony is limited to five minutes per person, and I'd like to take this time to remind our audience that there will be an open microphone session toward the end of the public hearing. As we move through the testimony, just a quick reminder to say your name for the record and to speak into the microphone.

I'd like to now call up four individuals, first of all, Elaine Topsky from DCI Rocky Boy, Michael Lunderman, DCI Rocky Boy, Jessica Danforth, Executive Director of the Native Youth Sexual Help Network, and Gerry Weisner, Native American Children's Alliance. Are you four people in the room? Please come on up to the table. Once again, Elaine Topsky, Michael Lunderman, Jessica Danforth, Gerry Weisner. So kindly introduce yourself, you have five minutes each. I apologize for the short time, but certainly testimony, of course, is taken from the Tribal Law Policy Institute at TLPI.org. All right, so whoever would like to begin, please speak loudly into the microphone and do give your name and your affiliation. Thank you.

*Elaine Topsky:*

Good afternoon, my name is Elaine Topsky, I'm from the Rocky Boy's Reservation in Montana and there are two tribes that are made up the Rocky Boy's Reservation, that's *Chippewa* and *Cree* and it's very different, but we've made it work. Our reservation is one of the newest in the country, it was established in 1916, so we're pretty young there. The *Chippewa Cree* people have a very rich heritage, part of that reason is that we're isolated from the nearest town of Haver, so we've been able to maintain our culture and our language, unlike a lot of other tribes.

Some of the things that are a challenge to us now is that we have a fast growing population, 40 percent of our population are under the age of 18, so we face those challenges for our

small reservation, that has a population, or people living on the reservation of over 3000 people. Our enrollment is over 6000. So we have those challenges facing us, with shortage of housing and the media that exposes our young people to wanting to be part of what's happening in the mainstream of society, those identity issues that we're struggling with, with our young people.

We have a high poverty problem, like most reservations, and I don't want to dwell on the negative parts of our community, we have many good things in our community. But poverty is a different meaning with the mainstream of society and the Indian people. I can say that I am very rich in my culture because I have been taught in the oral tradition of my tribe. I learned all that at home, it's something that you can't buy anywhere today. The meaning of poverty could be, in our community we could have like three families live in a home, but yet you would hear the parents or the grandparents in that home saying that they are rich because their children are alive and well. The kids' health is another thing that we can't buy.

It could probably be confusing to some people when we have our pow-wows. Just last weekend I went to Bozeman where there was a dancer that gave away in a special ceremony, maybe about \$3000 in a half hour, which is very confusing when we compare what we mean by wealth to the main society, but those are the kinds of culture values that we firmly believe in. Those values are instilled in our young people, and those are the ones we hang tightly to. We want our children to believe in those values because those values are the ones that have sustained us for over 500 years, our language and who we are as Indian people.

As an Indian woman, I know that my role is very different from a man and I know in my world of work, I really believe in equality with men and women, but within my tribe I know I have my role that I would never cross. It's something that I live by and most Indian people understand that. So the Indian world, we do not have those equal rights, but as a female I have a strong position, too.

So we have those challenges I'm telling you about. One area that we have a huge problem with is attendance, school attendance. At our regular monthly consul meetings as a director I go to, we heard from our school superintendents, we're a small reservation and yet one of our small schools won a state basketball championship. We have great athletes, these young boys are so neat, they are the role models in our community, and the superintendent there said we did okay with grades in attendance as long as the basketball season was going and now that it's over, it just dropped. We need people in a community to help encourage our young people to keep on and finish school. So we had that stronghold with our young people, if we can just capitalize on that somehow, we can do it as tribes. So we try to do that.

Part of my job as a program tribal TANF director, I'm the voice of our tribe in the people that we help in that program. We have 160 families that fluctuate per month, that's a lot of people, that's over 300 children. In our plan it requires our children to be in school, so that gives me a leverage to say if you can't keep your kids in school, you could lost your benefits. We also have the tribal law and order code that states that kids have to be in school until their age of 18, so we have some of those things that we can work on and help keep our kids in school.

We offer many types of activities as a tribal TANF program, it gives me the flexibility that we are able to design a program to tighten up some of those circles and fill in gaps. One area is that I made substance abuse testing as part of the eligibility requirement and it has given me a picture of what is happening in our community as far as drugs and alcohol go. When we first started, we didn't have meth, we didn't have grandparents that tested positive and that started in 2004. This past year is see more grandparents, more caregivers testing positive for drugs and alcohol, and this past year meth is back really strong.

So those are the kinds of data I can give to the consul and to the White Sky Hope Center, the chemical dependency people, so we can address what's happening. And the

attendance that we collect from our schools, I'm trying to shoot for 8 percent attendance and 2.0 at a minimum for students. Those are areas that I'm working on and be able to show the consul the outcomes of those areas. One of the good things that we've done is collaboration with our programs, with the children exposed to violence, so we can address those areas and talk about how to strengthen them.

One of the things that we do well is the staffing once a week and once a month meetings of staffing. The social services staff meet and talk about cases and we come up with solutions or different ways to help our families who are struggling. Because of our poverty or shortage in housing, we are faced with those challenges, so we talk, come up with solutions on how to best plan ways to help our families. We overwhelm them sometimes—oh, zero minutes.

One of the things that help us, too, is humor, without humor I don't know how we could have survived. But one last thing that I want to do is we try to think about ways to help our families and one of the things that was in our own backyard and our own yards was the Peacemakers. Peacemakers are those people that have been recognized in our community to serve as advocates. We call on them for intervention, counseling sessions. These are people that are older, they're known for their standing in the community, but it's very powerful to go to a session and to help a family there. We practice our values and talk to and reminded of the meaning of our children, how they're given to us as gifts from the Creator and how to best help that child.

Those are some of the best things that we've had done, and I'll close my story with a story that I heard one of our relatives share. As a young child, this boy was caught stealing in a store and his father told him how wrong that is and told him if you want to steal something from the white man, steal his paper. The meaning of that paper is the tradition or the education of the white man, steal that paper and that will take you a long way in life. So that's what I tell our case managers, is to encourage our parents to send their kids to school every day and do their lessons every day

and that's a way out, that's one way out that we have from our situation. Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

Gerry Weisner:

(NATIVE LANGUAGE @ 57:52). My name is Gerry Weisner, I am from Wheelock, Oklahoma, I am *Muscogee Creek*, I am a tribal prosecutor, prior to that I was in the United States Marine Corps for six years as a military police. I prosecute for several tribes in Oklahoma and one in Texas, which also extends down into Mexico. Along with prosecuting, I am also the executive director of the Native American Children's Alliance. I want to share with you some of my experience, maybe within the last year, that unfortunately you may be familiar with. I want to talk about violence in Indian country and the things that I see on my docket.

I have seen within the past year a six-month-old baby who was raped, to the extent that fortunately she is going to be living, however she has suffered injuries where she'll never have children. I've also had the gang rape of an 11-year-old girl. In this community where I investigated the gang rape, which was perpetrated by, I believe there was seven tribal young men, the incident was so rampant in this community that they have normalized sexual assault. As I was investigating, many of the elder women told me well, you've received a traffic ticket, everybody gets assaulted, it's just the way it is. You get a traffic ticket, you don't like it, but you pay and you move on. Sexual assault was so normalized and is so normalized in this community, that they accept it and they move on. It happened to grandma, it happened to mom, it happened to me, it may have happened to my brother. I am not and I will not take that as our tradition and the way that we are.

I also want to talk about child homicide, in the past year I have had one. In my ten years as a prosecutor I've had three child homicides, one of them has yet to be prosecuted due to the jurisdictional quagmire that exists in Indian country. In looking at the child homicide and also reflecting on the title of this committee, that while I am trying to

prosecute the mother who shook her child violently and because this child was still making noises, decided to put a sock down his throat to get the child to be quiet, she did this in the presence of the other children in the home. Those children were exposed to violence, but not only that, those children are victims of child abuse, so when I look at the title of this, even, Children Exposed to Violence in Indian Communities, well, if they're exposed to violence, someone has abused that child. So they're not only exposed, they are themselves victims of child abuse.

I think that looking at these, just as the victim earlier, the woman was telling about being a victim of human trafficking herself. I've worked with the National District Attorney Association to address human trafficking and the problems ongoing with that issue, specifically to prosecutors and extending to tribal prosecutors, that there is no such thing as a child prostitute. Children are, by definition, unable to consent to sex, so how can they consensually give themselves up for a sexual act for money? It's not plausible.

We need to recognize and reevaluate what we're doing to ourselves as charging instruments, as police, as advocates and how we are addressing child abuse in Indian country, how we are addressing violence that is going on, on a daily basis, in our Indian homes and in our Indian communities. As a result, I have a few recommendations that I'm briefly making here and I'm available at any other time, however I feel, first of all, that funding for child abuse and child sexual assault and maltreatment training is essential. Our responding officers, law enforcement, advocates, our mental and medical health providers need to be better trained on how to participate as a multidisciplinary team, recognizing not any one profession can make this better, but by pooling our heads together to make our community safer. Bringing those people together with appropriate training, so that they may not only train themselves and those in their departments, but take that training to the community.

It was talked a moment ago about technology facilitated crimes, Snapchat, well another way of—I call them bad guys—another way bad guys are communicating is through

Xbox, sending communications there, where they're going to meet, what they're going to do, and they always want to meet at the tribal gas station or the tribal hotel or the tribal casino parking lot. How about the apps, Words with Friends, there's always a chat option there. Prosecutors and investigators, how are you going to find that information? Well, let's pool our heads together, I may not have investigated one of those, but I know somebody else has. By sharing our resources, training each other on child abuse responses, we will be better equipped to address the maltreatment in our communities.

Funding for a national campaign to recruit Indian foster families. I have spent too many night at the courthouse, myself and my ICWA worker, with five babies on a holiday weekend because we cannot find an appropriate foster family, not to mention just an Indian foster family, but a family, period. We need to recruit more Indian families, that may help a significant impact on arguing about the Indian Child Welfare Act itself. We need to recruit nationally Indian families to be foster families.

And lastly, I would ask and request that we integrate therapy as a core curriculum in our schools. We have PE, we have basketball, we have all these sports but what about our hearts and our heads? I think that it needs to be a core curriculum that we take care of these matters, otherwise we're taking a shotgun approach onto what's a phenomenon and unfortunately circumstance that is affecting all. Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

*Michael Lunderman:*

Good afternoon, everybody, I would like to take this time to express my gratitude for giving this opportunity to speak on behalf of my relatives, the youth and families that I am representing today. My name is Michael Lunderman and I am a member of the *Sicangu Lakota Nation* of the *Rosebud Sioux Tribe*. I am a daughter, sister, auntie and mother of the He Dog community of the Rosebud Tribe, located on the Rosebud Reservation. I have three children who are my

motivation for the work that I do. So again, I am very humbled to be here today.

The Rosebud Reservation is located on the plains of south central South Dakota, it is made up of 20 different communities spanning 1400 square miles and four different counties. It is very rural, and is surrounded by beautiful scenery. There are 44,000, roughly, enrolled tribal members, 28,000 of those enrolled members live on the Rosebud Reservation and of those 28,000, 8,000 of those are under the age of 18.

I am one of two prevention and outreach coordinators for the Rosebud Sioux Tribe's Defending Childhood Initiative. I provide educational awareness trainings and presentations regarding children's exposure to violence. I have provided these trainings to the communities of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, local school boards, teacher end services, middle school students, high school students, the Head Start staff and families; also to the Rosebud Sioux Tribe's (inaudible @ 66:28\_APR160401AM) Teepee, which is the JDC and the adult corrections facility.

Through these trainings and presentations we explore the effects of violence on the youth and what the possible outcomes can be, such as behavior issues in school, poor attendance and school grades involved in multiple systems and the potential for the intergenerational violence to continue. We engage our families and youth to empower them and at the same time providing them resources to start the healing through traditional and modern methods.

The Rosebud Sioux Tribe's Defending Childhood Initiative began in 2010, it is a collaborative effort made up of approximately 35 organizations from the tribal, state and federal level. We are designed to effectively respond to and reduce the negative impact of children's exposure to violence, increase community awareness of children's exposure to violence, prevent children's exposure to violence and to holistically assess the project's relational progress in regards to implementing and sustaining the above efforts through capacity building and collaboration.



The project is funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice, Delinquency Prevention, the U.S. Department of Justice under the Defending Childhood Initiative.

Our technical assistance providers, Futures Without Violence and Native Streams, has been very instrumental in our program, the Rosebud DCI, and our vision in the development of our work. The Rosebud Sioux Tribe, along with the Rocky Boy Chippewa Cree Tribe were the only two tribes of eight sites to be awarded this grant.

I speak today, not only from my personal experiences, but also from the work I have done on the Rosebud Reservation. I am here to address the need for change as service providers, when we engage our families in need. Our Native people have gone through genocide and oppression and because of our historical trauma, our people continue to suffer from those effects. Our (wakayesha @ 68:43\_APR16 0401AM) are faced with many exposures to violence, particularly with domestic violence and sexual assault.

As children growing up, we should be reassuring them that they are safe from domestic violence and sexual assault, but when they are victims of DV and SA, their sacred circle of life is incomplete. If our children do not heal from these violent exposures, their spiritual, emotional, mental and physical being cannot move forward in a positive way. This then creates a negative cycle our youth become involved with that gets them labeled as the bad kids, the one abused, the delinquents and lost in the system.

I am here to speak on behalf of the RST Defending Childhood Initiative and what we have seen as barriers and what actions we are taking to create a strength, needs and cultural discovery based approach. During the planning phase of DCI, we conducted a community needs assessment and below are some of the risk factors identified through this needs assessment: Substance abuse, lack of positive of cultural perceptions, low self esteem, truancy, lack of parental involvement in education, incarcerated parents, lack of police protection, access to alcohol and drugs by children themselves, lack of transportation to

access services based off the reservation, gang activity, involved in the court system, attention seeking and lack of boundaries with strangers, inappropriate sexual behavior at school, and the continual exposure to violence without any interventions.

When our children live through domestic violence and sexual assault, many symptoms, like the ones listed above, become present. Why do you think we can't work together?

Programs that provide mental health counseling have a difficult time sharing information because of confidentiality. Two, once a child enters the judicial system, family court requires the parents and child to complete treatment programs, parenting classes and other dispositions. Once the child enrolls in a program like DCI, this information is difficult to obtain from the family court. Three, how schools address the behavior issues in the classroom and the consequences that ensue because of handbook policy and procedures. And four, how the Rosebud Sioux Tribe defines domestic violence and child neglect and abuse and our tribal codes, and how that reflects back to our communities and the lack of support for our victims.

What do we need to work together? RST Defending Childhood Initiative holds monthly collaborative body meetings. As a result of these meetings and with the help of our technical assistance providers, we are developing a shared responsibility intake form. Those children that are in multiple systems or programs will complete this shared responsibility intake form and all the programs will recognize it. This will keep parents from having to complete multiple forms for each respective system or program their child is in. Information sharing will not be duplicated and it also holds programs accountable.

RST Defending Childhood Initiative has been an active partner with the Family Wellness Court. We have found it difficult to obtain information pertaining to the child so a memorandum of agreement will be established and information can be communicated between DCI and the Family Wellness Court. And because the court system is understaffed on Rosebud, we can provide resources to the

child and the family so they can complete dispositions places upon them and with the MOA in place, the court will recognize those resources.

I don't think we have time for a story, but we had a young lady that was in the family court system, she was then transferred out into a treatment facility...three treatment facilities. She was sexually abused in two of those facilities and also physical abuse was going on. But because there is no type of agreement between the family court with these facilities, what we are going to continue working with our family court is to implement an MOA or MOU with the facilities, so we can help these facilities treat our Native youth in these treatment facilities.

RST Defending Childhood Initiative has addressed the behavior issues in the classroom setting. We have identified the lack of resources available to the students through the school when they have committed an offense according to the school's policy handbook. We have held meetings with the area school administrators and superintendents to address how effective or ineffective the consequences are. Through these meetings we have been able to provide educational classes and alternatives to the punishments, instead of ISS or OSS, they are considering volunteer groups with the homeless shelter or helping the elders in the communities. They have also allowed students to take part in sessions where they are given the teachings behind the *inipi* and other ceremonies.

Our Rosebud tribal codes are so out of date, we are working with our technical assistance providers and our evaluation team, which includes BJ and Lillian Jones, the help revise our domestic violence code, our childhood neglect code, our childhood abuse code. We are also implementing a new child endangerment code. Our children are treated as adults when they commit a crime, so we are also developing a juvenile code, and hopefully with that, we can include culturally appropriate methods.

What we have noticed when working with parents and children who have been victims of domestic violence and

child abuse is that we unconsciously cater to the perpetrator. Our women and children have to rearrange their lives to find safety when the perpetrator can continue to live in the home that may not belong to them and only have to show up to court. When they do show up to court, they are allowed to plead down. If the evidence is there, we are incorporating into the domestic violence code that they are not allowed to plead down.

Our child neglect and child abuse codes are so vague that our parents and caregivers are not held accountability. With the revision of these codes, there will be stricter laws to hold our parents and caregivers of our innocent children accountable for the acts of violence against them. The Rosebud Sioux Tribe Defending Childhood Initiative has worked collaboratively with the White Buffalo Calf Women's Society, (inaudible @ 75:42\_APR160401AM) University's (inaudible @ 75:44\_APR160401AM), Rosebud Sioux Tribe's Childcare Program, the Rosebud Sioux Tribe's Fatherhood and Motherhood Initiative, the Rosebud Sioux Tribe Domestic Violence Prevention Initiative to provide cultural practices to our children exposed to violence and their families.

We are offering name giving ceremonies to our youth so they can have a spiritual identity and that will help them continue on their path to healing. We are offering coming of age ceremonies, so our youth know their roles in society. We have conducted three buffalo harvests, we explain to the kids the teachings that come with the buffalo and the role that buffalo men and women play in our culture. We are gearing up for our annual *Timpsula*, which is the wild turnip harvest, along with that this year we are going to create a natural herbs and medicine booklet that our youth have asked to do. *Whacheepee's* are such a big part of our culture, we are targeting four communities on the Rosebud Reservation to teach our fathers and mothers how to create regalia for their children to participate in the Rosebud Sioux Tribe's annual fair at the end of the summer.

We, as professionals and relatives, know the hardships our children and families are facing. These negative

experiences label our children and their families because we are deficit based programs. We as Native people need to start focusing on the positive of each family and build around their strengths. Our families already know what's wrong in their lives, we can't build on negativity so why do we continue to try? We need to start seeing our children exposed to violence as relatives rather than clients and to keep encouraging them to continue on the healing journey. We are all here for one important reason and that is American Indian and Alaska Native children's exposure to violence.

I will leave you with this last statement. If you were to leave the work that you do today, who would be there to take your place? Remember, this is not hard work, it is heart work. Thank you for your time and attention.

[APPLAUSE]

*Joanne Shenandoah:*

Thank you, ladies, for your testimony. I'd like to also remind folks that they could and should submit their testimony to the following email: [testimony@TLPI.org](mailto:testimony@TLPI.org), and we will be looking at that as Advisory Committee. But thank you, ladies, again, and appreciate your time. We'd now like to call up to the podium L. Matthew West, Victims Assistance Program, for his testimony, and we realize and apologize that five minutes is not very long, but please know that our Advisory Council will be reading your testimony, as well, once it's submitted, so I just want to remind you again that we'll be looking at those submissions through Tribal Law and Policy Institute. Thank you very much, Mr. West, for joining us today.

*L. Matthew West:*

Thank you. My name is Matthew West and I'm a member of the *Ute Tribe* in Fort Duchesne, Utah. I've just turned 55 years of age, well, last year, so I'll be 56 this year. So some of you have to listen to me and some of you I need to listen to, because I guess I'm expected to know a little bit about what life is about at this age. I've worked for the tribes for 28 years for the Native people and I've been out there on the line and I've been on call for the last 28 years in the jobs that I've done with the tribes, as a tribal police officer, as a tribal prosecutor, as a public defender for their tribes, as an ICWA

worker and now I work in the victims assistance program from an OVW grant to provide assistance for victims, whether it be a mother, a father, the children, I help them with what they need to be safe. I see so much pain and heartbreak amongst our people these days and it's all because we've lost sight of what we're supposed to be, who we're supposed to be. You see these signs that say 'These hands were never meant to hit,' it's not a tradition to hit a woman, those are true. But we forgot about those traditions, those customs, those practices that we had. We forgot about our songs, we forgot about our dances, our ceremonies, our stories, and we replaces all of that with another culture's values, their morals, what they think is right. The government couldn't get rid of us, but if they later on had a plan to take us away, child by child, family by family, tribe by tribe, by waiting it out and letting the media, letting Hollywood, letting songs, letting all these influences take us apart, well it was a good plan that they came up with and I don't doubt that somebody may have thought of this a long time ago.

But we have to get back to the roots. We know that we're going to survive and we knew that this was going to happen because it was prophesized, it was told to us, that we're going to be scattered, we're going to be put down, we're almost going to not be here, but we were told we are going to survive, we are going to rise again, we will be a strong people again, but we have to remember all of those things that we forgot. And we have to look to the Creator for guidance, for help, we have to listen to the will of the ancestors that are there, they're praying for us every day, they're praying for our children. We have to save our children, our most valuable and precious resource. The government has obligated themselves to help, they gave themselves that power and we can't let them forget that, forever. But we have to take charge and we have to lead the way, we have to save our people, we have to save our children. If nobody else is going to do it, we are. How many of us have to open our eyes and join together to start making that become a reality. We can't let another child be lost, it just can't be done, we need to start now and we need to rally the troops, not only attack this problem head on but outflank

it, too. We need to collaborate, we need to work together, like a great chief said, put our heads together to see what we can do to save our children.

So before I cry, I'm going to ask all of you to do that. Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

*Joanne Shenandoah:* Thank you very much for your testimony. I'd like to now call up Sandy White Hawk, Director of First Nations Repatriation Institute, is Sandy in the room? To the podium, please.

*Sandy White Hawk:* That is a humorous attempt, five minutes for Indians. I don't have enough gray hair to push too far beyond that. I want to just say good afternoon and thank you for this opportunity to stand before you and speak on behalf of the relatives who are impacted by adoption and foster care. My name is Sandy White Hawk, I'm from the *Rosebud Sioux Tribe*. I'm more moved by what I've been hearing, now that I'm actually able to speak, I'm impacted by what I just heard, especially from our relatives from Rosebud, you made me think of my mother. But I am the founder and director of First Nations Repatriation Institute, it's an organization, the only one of its kind so far, that is attempting to become a resource for those who have been adopted out and grew up in foster care or birth relatives in our communities. We aim to be a resource for them for healing, connection, and whatever it is else that they may identify.

I wasn't going to speak today, I came here to hear, to learn and to support my brothers and sisters as they talk about this very difficult subject, but I want to thank Cathy for encouraging me through just a conversation, that those of us that are taken away are often forgotten, and we have the lived experience to convey what really goes on and what really happens, because adoption has always been seen or often been seen by the adoption industry, has done a really good job of teaching us this, that it is the answer to a crisis. But what I have learned since working with adoptees, is that it is not, because nobody goes back into the home to ensure that the child is, indeed, in a safe home. Also, I'm thinking

about, as Chrissi Nimmo recounted her experience with baby Veronica, as she returned her to her family, and I was thinking about it, I know everyone else who's been removed from their home can relate to that feeling of going so far inside yourself that all that happens is that a tear rolls down your face. That is the epitome of extreme trauma. When you are going through trauma, you have to go so far within to survive that. I know that because I remember the day I was handed to my white adoptive family and I have lots of memories thereafter of that trauma, but I always remembered it as an observer of a little brown girl. That means that, at age 18 months old I disassociated for the first time because it was so frightening to be placed in a place other than my family. And I spent all my growing up years experiencing and re-experiencing that because the home I was placed in ended up being physically abusive, sexually abusive and spiritually abusive and I've never said it in this way, but also culturally abusive, because anything that I heard of being Indian was always exceptionally negative: Don't grow up to be a good-for-nothing Indian, don't be a lazy Indian like your mother, all the Indians on the reservation that you come from would be happy to be in your place and have what you have.

So mine was an extreme placement and it was a difficult road of recovery, but I am here today. We know that there are loving placements that have occurred, as well, but love does not replace connection. We also know that we don't have a lot of any much research that really gives us good information or information to build on to create resources. So First Nations Orphan Association collaborated with the University of Minnesota family social science and sociology department and we created a survey. Mind you, there are only four PhD studies done on Native adoptees and the largest pool surveyed was 20 people, so I wanted a large body. 336 responded to our survey, our online survey, IRB approved, and I just wanted to share with you our preliminary findings. They are that out of the 336 respondents—because we opened it to all adoptees because at some point we want to compare same race adoption to transracial adoption—so 126 responded, stating identifying themselves as Native; 95 of those 126 said they



had been reunified with some part of their family. Of those 95, 50 percent of them had contemplated and planned suicide; 23 attempted. 50 percent of them report physical abuse, 50 percent of them report emotional abuse, and the percentage when you pull it out as well, is 84. 5 percent reported depression.

These are hard findings when you think about that these were supposed to be safe placements for children and these individuals grew up in an environment that did not nurture their identity. We're going to look further to find out, because we really do want to look at how much do children suffer, because we know that they do, in homes that are without violence in them. In a way it's almost more insidious, if your parents have been loving and given you every benefit, how do you, then, tell them that I am not happy, I don't know who I am, I don't know what I look like, I need to be able to tell my children who I am and who they are.

I just visited with an adoptee, she happens to be in stage 3 colon cancer and she was weeping with me and saying that, "My parents loved me and I loved them dearly, they have no idea how many times I wanted to kill myself, only because I didn't know who I was and I couldn't explain to them what was happening to me." So it's exceptionally important to remember that while we are looking at violence within communities, when we think we're placing children in a permanent home, we have to remember that that permanency begins at the essence of life, which is where we're from, the homeland that we're from, the family that we're from. Thank you for your time.

[APPLAUSE]

*Joanne Shenandoah:*

Thank you very much. I just want to give another chance to Jessica Danforth, if she's in the room. Apparently not, so at this time we will open the floor for an open mic session. If there's someone who would like to come up and share, you're more than welcome to, at this time. Okay, again I would encourage folks to go to email your testimony please at [testimony@TLPI.org](mailto:testimony@TLPI.org). I would like to also recognize the support and assistance of the Tribal Law Policy Institute, for

all their hard work in planning the hearing and preparing the witnesses for testimony. Could everyone from TLPI please stand? We thank you very much for all your hard work.

[APPLAUSE]

*Joanne Shenandoah:*

Also, I'd like to thank the Department of Justice for the commitment and we'd like to also thank the Advisory Council here for their presence and dedication to this issue. And most importantly, we want to thank all of our witnesses today. We now will adjourn, the next segment of the public hearing will commence at 8:30 am here in this room tomorrow. I want to take this time to say how helpful our testimonies have been and we thank you and we are adjourned until tomorrow morning . Good evening.

[END PUBLIC TESTIMONY]