

**Testimony Before the House Education
and Labor Subcommittee on Healthy
Families and Communities**

Hearing on “Corporal Punishment in
Schools and its Effect on Academic
Success”

Submitted by

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Mother of Student who Received Corporal Punishment

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Chair McCarthy, Ranking Member Platts, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify at this hearing on corporal punishment and its effects on academic success. My name is Linda Pee, and I am pleased to join you today to discuss how corporal punishment had a negative effect on my daughter, Audrey, and how my efforts to protect her from the practice were unsuccessful.

I. Personal Background

I was born in Maben, Mississippi, and until July 2009, I lived in Cumberland, Mississippi. My daughter, Audrey, attended schools in the Webster County School District from second grade until twelfth grade. Audrey moved to East Webster High School in sixth grade. That first year, they sent a discipline form home with Audrey letting parents opt out of corporal punishment. You fill it out and send it back with the child, and you can tick a box saying you don't want your child hit in school. You also have to sign the handbook, stating you read the rules. I signed saying it was OK for her to be punished, because it never occurred to me she could be injured from it. I thought she would be safe in school.

II. Paddling Incidents

When Audrey was in sixth grade, she was paddled for the first time. The paddles they use look sort of like a flattened baseball bat – they're a piece of wood about 15 inches long, three inches wide, and an inch thick, with a handle at one end. The gym coach paddled her for being tardy for gym class. There were 10 kids late for class that

day, and the coach lined them up and hit them on their behinds in front of the other students.

When Audrey got home that day, she was pretty upset and she told me that she had marks on her behind. When I saw the mark of the paddle, I was shocked and infuriated. I just couldn't believe it. She told me that she got one lick. I couldn't believe that one lick would make marks like that. I was so upset I called my sister, who said I needed to take her to the emergency room. So that's what I did. She had purple bruises – you could see the mark of the paddle across her buttocks.

After that incident, I made it clear to the school that I didn't want Audrey paddled again. I went in the next day and talked to the principal. I made it real clear that they'd better not lay another hand on my child. And there weren't any problems for a few years.

Audrey was an OK student – she had some trouble in math – but she had no major disciplinary incidents between sixth and twelfth grade. But the atmosphere in the school – it was really one of intimidation and fear. My daughter would see children paddled all the time. She said the principal would leave the door open so people could see that he was hitting people. Some kids get upset and angry when they see their friends paddled. And some kids become used to it, as if it was just OK to see their classmates being hit. But to me, it just doesn't seem right for kids to see that in school, for them to learn that this is OK. This practice can really injure kids, it injured my daughter.

I remember, at the beginning of Audrey's twelfth grade, I got a form from the school, asking if I gave permission for corporal punishment. I was offended they had even sent the form home, I had already been so clear in my wishes. But I completed it

anyway and sent it back – I put a huge “X” on the box for no paddling, and sent the form back to the school.

In March 2007, only a few months before Audrey was due to graduate, she was paddled again. She was hit for violating the dress code, because she was wearing sweatpants that fell between the knees and the ankles, in violation of a new rule stating that students could not show their ankles at school. She received two blows from the principal in his office. She was bruised again, she had bruises all over her behind. She was paddled in first period and she had bruises all over her by third period. I took her to the doctor’s office and he documented the bruises, and we went to the sherriff’s department.

Audrey didn’t want to tell me what happened; she knew I was going to be mad. And I was mad, I was upset. I called the superintendent and told him what happened. I didn’t understand how they could paddle her when I’d signed the form telling them not to. I was so upset. But the school said they couldn’t find the form. I trusted the school to keep this document safe in its files.

After Audrey was paddled again, I tried everything I could think of to protect my daughter. I went to the sheriff’s department, to file charges for assault. I went to a school board meeting and tried to talk about the issue, but nothing happened. I filed a case with the State Department of Education, but I got an email back saying I should go through the local body. And I tried to pursue a court case. But we couldn’t get anywhere – there’s immunity for teachers who paddle in school. I was left with no options. They bruised my child and injured her twice. I tried to protect her by opting her out of this

horrible type of punishment, but in the end even doing that, I was unable to protect her and the school still hurt her.

III. Protecting My Child

In schools, education should be the primary focus. You want to feel like you're sending your child to a safe place. You certainly don't want your child injured and bruised. It's crazy. The school should be a safe place, not a place where your child gets injured.

What hurts most about this is that I tried to do everything I could to protect my child, but that wasn't enough. This child is a gift from God that I've vowed to protect. She's my life. I've been divorced for 13 years. When Audrey was growing up, it was me and her. It hurts that I feel like I haven't protected her. In the end, no parent should have to be worried about that.

There are other ways to change the behavior of children in school – that would have been better for Audrey. I remember when she was in elementary school she got in trouble for talking in class. I told the teacher, if you keep her in from recess and give her some extra work – that will take care of that. And it did, because social time was important to my daughter.

I don't think anybody should be hitting anybody else's children. It's not the type of decision teacher or principals should make – it's too complicated and too much can go wrong. You can't know what mood the teacher's in, whether he's mad and swings too hard. And you can't know how it'll affect a child, whether a child will be bruised or injured or worse. This just shouldn't happen in schools – not to *anyone's* child.