

Congressional Briefing: Addressing the Mental Health Impact of
Violence and Trauma on Children

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DIANE CHAMPE' REMARKS

Do you want to feel loved? Do you want to feel cared for? Do you feel that you can have your needs met in a healthy way, or do you live with anger, fear and despair?

Those are questions that I asked myself for over 55 years, because of being abused as a child. I was isolated and physically, mentally, emotionally and physically abused for the first 21 years of my life. I got married, left home and decided to make a success of my life. So I started working in the mailroom of a Fortune 20 company. I had survived by splitting everything off – which is what a lot of survivors do. I worked hard; got married. Within 19 years I was a strategic planner on the regional vice president's staff.

I then found out that my brother was sexually abusing my four-year old nieces. All of my memories came flooding back, but I confronted him because I was not going to allow that to continue. And I was instrumental in having him convicted as a child molester. And he got the usual slap on the wrist. He was convicted of two felonies of oral copulation with a minor, was not kicked out of the military, went to his job during the day and to jail at night for a year. And that was it.

I entered therapy and ended up spending 23 years in therapy from ages 34 to 57 and went through five hospitalizations because I was suicidal. I had major depression, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and I had developed about twenty personalities, which is not uncommon, although there is an organization out there that wants to disprove and put down people with what is now known as Dissociative Identity Disorder. I was blessed in that I had the best of care, which very few people get.

In the meantime, the Fortune 20 company fired me, two years from retirement, after working 28 years – with no severance pay and no benefits, even though I had an outstanding performance appraisal. I filed a lawsuit in Federal court and won.

In the meantime, I kept working and I spent 11 of those 23 years in therapy integrating all of those personalities into one. I am now working to help other survivors. I have a website called wearesurvivors.org and I'm working to establish a safe haven for adult survivors so that they have a warm place to go, where they are welcome.

Everything you all said today is absolutely correct. It's what we need. What we also need – is what I believe you said, Kathryn – is some kind of screening mechanism to show that there is trauma for children. We screen for everything else, but we don't

screen for trauma. We also need to eliminate the statute of limitations so that we can sue our perpetrators and get compensated. My mental health bills cost over \$300,000. This was in the 80s and 90s – and you can imagine what it would be today. I spent over \$100,000 out of my pocket. How many people can afford that? They don't, so they don't get the care that they need.

The second thing we need it to strengthen the Americans with Disabilities Act. The ADA is great, however its primary focus is on physical disabilities. Try getting a mental health disability accommodation.

I'll give you an example: A woman has breast cancer. She goes in to her supervisor and she says "I just found out that I have breast cancer, I have to leave work two days a week to go to chemotherapy. I'll come in early the rest of the week and make up for it." She'll get an accommodation – no questions asked.

I come in. I just found out I am diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. I have to go to therapy two days a week. But I'll come in early the rest of the week and make up for it. I won't get an accommodation. Most survivors are put on an action plan, they are reduced to part-time work and they eventually lose their jobs and any healthcare that they had.

Those are some of the main things that need to be addressed.

I appreciate the opportunity, Helga. Thank you very much.