

Madame Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Fr. Bernie Lattner, I am a Federal Law Enforcement Chaplain, and a Dodge County Sheriff Chaplain. I'm the father of 3 adopted sons, 2 from Russia and 1 US born from Idaho. All 3 of my children have special needs as they had experienced abuse and neglect in their pre-adoptive settings.

My youngest son, Kelly was 10 when I adopted him and was in 5th grade at the Kasson-Mantorville School District. His only pre-diagnosis at the time was ADHD and we were in the process of doing a 504 plan instead of an IEP. I had briefed the Principal, the Special Ed teacher, and his regular teacher prior to the start of the school year. All the staff would report regularly that Kelly was a pleasant and polite child. He made friends easily and only struggled in organization and turning in homework.

During a period of recess in the fall, Kelly went behind a tree to urinate instead of going back into the school to use the restroom. Sometime later in the day, the School Resource Officer or "SRO" heard about what my son had done. The SRO questioned my son. My son was charged with 2 misdemeanors of Disorderly Conduct and Indecent Exposure. On top of this, my son was suspended for 3 days. All charges were dismissed but my son still missed days of school and because of this experience, Kelly developed a fear of law enforcement.

Later that school year, Kelly borrowed a smart phone from a friend to play a video game while on a break from classes. The boy he borrowed it from had given him permission to use his phone and told my son he could take it from his locker as long as he returned it when he was done. When this same boy went his locker and saw the phone gone, he panicked and went to the office to report it. The police officer interviewed the boy and then they reviewed the cameras and saw Kelly both take the phone and by this time return the phone. The boy even told the SRO that he had given Kelly permission to use the phone but just didn't know where it was when he went to his locker. Later that day, my son was charged with a gross misdemeanor theft offense for something valued between \$500 and \$1,000. This carries a potential sentence of up to one year in jail and \$3,000 in fines. Because of the charges, Kelly was again suspended for 3 days. The Court contacted us about a Diversion Program which my son completed. We later transferred to a different school district through Open Enrollment and my son never had another incident.

My son was recognized by his teachers and by the community as a good kid. He sang in choir, he volunteered in the community, he was the captain of his soccer team and he earned a soccer scholarship. Kelly is now 20 years old and is studying to be a teacher. He works as a paraprofessional in the classroom to help children with various disabilities.

I want to emphasize that 2 incidents I described, my son didn't hurt anyone else. The public urination a result of his experiences with his birth parents, as he was often in a rundown trailer home without running water. The school was aware of his delays and for the most part very helpful. I was shocked and saddened by what I felt were extreme disciplinary measures taken for relatively minor behavior issue with the urinating behind a tree and then for charging my son for a theft that he was not guilty of.

The suspensions had a negative impact on Kelly. Not only did suspensions keep son from attending school and learning, but they involvement of criminal charges was an unnecessary use

of community resources. My greatest concern is that I felt SRO action's bolstered the "school-to-prison pipeline." He removed children who had learning disabilities or histories of poverty, abuse, or neglect from the classroom. The current Superintendent has since removed this SRO from this role given his excessive amount of juvenile referrals and Diversions that far surpassed all other schools in the county.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my story today. I hope this committee will work on disciplinary reform by showing empathy towards our children. In a restorative approach to discipline, children benefit from educational and counseling services, mentors both in and out of schools, interaction with coaches in sports, as well as other positive modeling outlets. A simple approach of seeing things from the student's perspective, especially one from poverty and abuse can make a tremendous difference. A listening ear is often what students need most, and having a positive adult to help work through issues can help students in numerous ways that better benefit our society.