

Written Testimony of Tanya Long
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Parents Anonymous® Inc.
To the US Senate Subcommittee on Children and Families
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Good Afternoon, my name is Tanya Long, a Parent Leader for Parents Anonymous®. Thank you Chairman Dodd, Ranking Member Alexander and distinguished members of the Subcommittee on Children and Families for offering me this opportunity to put a face on the prevention of child abuse and neglect by focusing on the effective family strengthening strategies that Parents Anonymous® provides.

I am honored to testify today as a Parents Anonymous® Parent from Columbus, Ohio and share my personal story of prevention and strengthening of families. I am a mother of four children, ages 9, 10, 18 and 32 and a grandmother of a 7-year old. I am standing before you today as an example of just one family who has transformed their life for the better through the evidence-based Parents Anonymous® Program, a CAPTA funded program that provides weekly support groups for parents and their children serving millions nationwide for nearly 40 years. My testimony will focus on the importance of prevention, how I have given back to my community to ensure that programs meet the diverse needs of families and suggestions for strengthening the CAPTA statute. Reaching out, engaging and empowering parents like me are critical factors in protecting children and preventing child abuse and neglect for future generations. The unique philosophy and practices of mutual support and shared leadership ensure the success of Parents Anonymous® by building on people's strengths, helping individuals and families address their needs respectfully and providing weekly and on-going vital supports to parents and their children of any age, ethnicity, and who reside in neighborhoods all across America.

I am proud to continue the legacy first begun by Jolly K., the founding mother of Parents Anonymous®. This year marks the 35th anniversary of Jolly K.'s groundbreaking testimony before Congress when she put a human face to the complex problem of child maltreatment. A hush fell over the room when Jolly K. testified before Congress about her abusive behavior toward her child and how she successfully turned her life around through Parents Anonymous®. She was considered by leading experts as the single most effective witness because her personal story humanized the problem of child maltreatment by focusing on effective prevention programs (*Public Policy*, Harvard University, 1978). This courageous testimony in 1973 ensured the passage of the first federal legislation to focus on prevention: The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act of 1974 (CAPTA). Her moving Senate and House testimony reported on nationwide television and in the *Los Angeles Times* caught the attention of the nation and had a major impact on Congress and on public opinion.

I would like to share with you my personal journey. I sought help, received support, gained strength and found hope for my family's future through the proven effective solution provided by Parents Anonymous®. In 1998, I became homeless and hit rock bottom. My addiction to crack cocaine interfered with my ability to provide a safe and nurturing environment for my children. To the outside world I appeared to be a highly functioning and supportive parent. But, when I used drugs, I neglected my children's needs. I neglected my only daughter's emotional needs over the years given all my insecurities. My last two pregnancies were the straw that broke the camels back so to speak. I did not want to be a parent anymore because I was caught in the grips of my cocaine addiction. When I had my third and fourth children 18 months

apart, I felt overwhelmed and unprepared to take on the daunting task of raising two young boys. I was faced with the most important choice of my life – my children or the drugs. I chose my children. Then the real work began.

First, I made a commitment to become clean and sober then I entered an outpatient drug treatment program and moved into a homeless shelter. I needed to face head on my inadequacies and problems as a parent. I needed to move through the pain and really take hold of my emotions and what was underlying my actions. Parents Anonymous® is truly a prevention program open to any parent before or after abuse or neglect has occurred. Thankfully, they reached out to me and my children. We were able to attend the weekly Parents Anonymous® group and Children's Program at the shelter and one in the community after we found housing. Through the mutual support of the other parents, I was able to share my deepest fears, insecurities and feelings of shame and guilt for neglecting my children because of my drug addiction. I replaced my feelings of helplessness with hope and found the courage and strength to make lasting changes in my life. Parents Anonymous® was there for me through all of my ups and downs. They believed in me and gave me support in ways that I had never thought about. The other parents in my group helped me identify my strengths and find the solutions that worked for my family and me. I am living proof of the effectiveness of Parents Anonymous® in preventing child abuse and neglect.

After five months I was able to secure housing for my family. I had become a fully committed parent. Through my active participation in Parents Anonymous®, I had transformed my negative attitudes, gained new parenting skills, and significantly improved my self esteem. I am now going on ten years in recovery. I now am an Alcoholics Anonymous sponsor of 6 individuals committed to recovery. With all the positive changes in my life, I am a stronger parent and my children are thriving. My children became a joy to me. I've learned that if you treat children as valued human beings, you're going to get it back -- Be fair, honest and respectful and your children will grow up to be productive and caring adults. By strengthening my own family and receiving training and support from Parents Anonymous® Inc., I was also able to grow and develop my leadership skills. I feel blessed to be able to help other parents now, by giving back through various leadership roles such as co-trainer, board member and advocate for prevention programs to strengthen families. I have developed numerous publications such as *Shared Leadership in Action* curricula, training Manuals for Group Facilitators and Children's and Youth Program, and the National Parent Leadership Month Toolkit. Also I have co-trained and provided extensive technical assistance with Parents Anonymous® Inc. staff all over the country for national, state, and county agencies and initiatives on the development and enhancement of evidence-based, community-based prevention programs and the importance of engaging parents in the planning, implementation and evaluation of programs and policy decisions as specified in CAPTA. My prevention journey began with a focus on my own struggles and turning my life around by strengthening my family—but I believe I need to give back because I have been blessed to receive so much. Locally, I am serving on several Boards of Directors including Legal Aid of Columbus, Ohio, Columbus Child Development Council that oversees Head Start Programs, and the Godman Guild Community Center. I am also the co-founder of a Recovery Ministry. On a national level, I serve on the board of Parents Anonymous® Inc., National Center on Shared Leadership, founding member of the National Birth Parent Advocacy Organization and the Research Advisory Committee of Casey Family Programs.

I am confident that when my children grow up, they will raise their children in a safe and productive environment free of abuse and neglect and they will give back to their own

community. Several years ago, I received the greatest compliment from my own mother and family members when they acknowledged the positive changes in me. After seeing the way I handle my youngest boys, my mother said that she wished she had hugged my brothers more so that they would have become better men. I am currently attending college full time committed to obtaining a degree in communications. My 18-year old daughter is now very self-assured and confident. She has just graduated from high school and is going on to college. My daughter is also contributing to our community in various ways: she is a peer counselor at her high school, a camp counselor for several years and a Children's Program volunteer for Parents Anonymous[®] in Columbus, OH. My younger boys are happy, healthy and successful students. Both are very active in our church and one of my son's is currently helping to co-lead art classes at his school. Through my role modeling, they are all following in my footsteps and taking on leadership roles in their schools and the community.

My story is not unique. I am no more special than the hundreds of thousands of other Parents Anonymous[®] Parents who changed their life forever since we began in 1969 or any one else out there working to conquer their own personal demons. I am here giving a voice today to the family strengthening message as one example of hope and change. But we cannot forget the thousands of parents who are struggling with their parenting and other problems right now and do not have the courage to ask for help or there is no program or supportive person in their life to turn to. Strengthening CAPTA so that vital federal dollars support evidence-based programs like Parents Anonymous[®] will save the lives of thousands of children and their parents. Before closing, I thank you for your commitment and leadership on these critical issues facing families. Your help is desperately needed in order to prevent child abuse and neglect. Together, we can strengthen families all across America to prevent child abuse and neglect for generations to come.