

Education and Labor Committee Hearing  
HR 2343 – Education Begins at Home Act  
June 11, 2008

Testimony of Julie Fenley – Parents as Teachers program participant, Virginia Beach, VA

Thank you Mr. Chairman and Committee members for this opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Mrs. Julie Fenley and I participate in the Parents as Teachers program in Norfolk, Virginia. My husband, Victor Fenley, is an Aviation Structural Mechanic Airman Apprentice with the US Navy. We have 2 children who are both with us today – Meghan who is 7 years old and Zane who is two years old.

Our dream of being a military family started quite some time ago, but we officially started our Navy career in February of 2007. It has changed our lives in many ways. We were both raised in very small towns in south east Texas. When we moved to Virginia Beach I was terrified. I noticed immediately it was very different from life in Texas with our extended family there to support us. It has taken some time but I am so proud to call Virginia my home now. I have taken on the mentality that home is not where you are raised, but where the Navy sends you.

Zane and I joined the Parents as Teachers Program shortly after we arrived in Virginia Beach. During our first couple visits with Mrs. Terrilyn Williams, our parent educator, Zane was timid and shy but now when she comes through the door he is always excited to see her. He knows this is special play time with mommy and Miss Terri, which is Zane's name for her. During each meeting, Zane gets to experience a new activity and I get to learn a new parenting skill. For me it is the perfect opportunity to get inside his tiny little mind and really understand the reasons he does some of the silly little things he does or what is behind those behaviors that challenging for us as parents. The past couple visits have very special for Zane and myself because my husband was able to participate in the home visits. We have really enjoyed our visits as a family with Terrilyn.

When Zane was born he had a serious medical condition called PPHN also known as pulmonary hypertension in newborns. The physicians told me he could possibly suffer from neurodevelopment issues. After doing a little research, I made the discovery that the number one side effects for children who survive this illness is sudden hearing loss and speech delay. I was terrified and so worried that this could be the reason why Zane wasn't talking all that well. The in-home developmental screening that Terrilyn conducted confirmed that Zane had potential delays. Terrilyn calmly talked with me about my concerns and referred me to local resource professionals that could do further testing on Zane. The testing showed that he was approximately three months behind on his speech, but they suggested we wait a few months and see how he progresses on his own. Zane is now learning new words almost daily. If it weren't for Terrilyn I would not have found those resources on my own.

Terrilyn was also very helpful to us in finding other resources in the community that helped us through some difficult financial times, especially around the holidays. Terrilyn just seems to know how to get things done in our community and helped us connect with community resources that I didn't know about on my own.

I really wish I would have had this program when my daughter Meghan was Zane's age. I think this could have taught me some wonderful parenting techniques right from the start, rather than learning from trial and error. It has been very beneficial for both me and my husband. Before he left for training he was the one who took care of most behavioral issues. But, when he left for eight months it was my job to take care of everything, including discipline. This was a very stressful time for me. By the time we reunited eight months later, he and I had developed completely different approaches to parenting and discipline.

I asked Terrilyn about the problem we were having and she explained to me some things we could do and she gave me some helpful literature. It really helped my husband and me to really work together. Meagan

and Zane are wonderful children and we are so blessed to have them in our lives. They deserve the best this world has to offer, including my husband and I being the best possible parents. I feel in my heart that Parents as Teachers is just what we were need in our life. It helps me to be a better parent. I think every military family could benefit from Parents as Teachers. We are blessed to have such a wonderful program at Norfolk, but there is a waiting list so many families aren't able to participate. I respectfully encourage the Committee to support the Education Begins at Home Act, which would provide much needed funding so more families can benefit from home visiting programs like Parents as Teachers.

I would like to say in closing a special thank you to Mrs. Terrylinn Williams for making such an impact in our lives not only as a parent educator but as a friend. Thank you for your dedication to this program and for all your encouraging words and knowledge. I feel so validated as a parent each time Terrilyn visits. Once again thank you for teaching me how to be my children's best and most important teacher.