

Pastor Latasha Harrison Fields
Founder, Christian Home Educators Support System (CHESS)
House Committee on the Budget
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Thank you Chairman Yarmuth, Ranking Member Womack and members of the Committee for inviting me to testify today.

My name is Latasha Harrison Fields. I've been married to Ronald L. Fields, II for 13 ½ years. We are home educators of four wonderful children, two girls and two boys. We graduated our oldest daughter from our homeschool academy in 2014 and she is now a recent college graduate from the University of Bridgeport in CT with a Bachelors degree in Nutritional Science with a 3.1 GPA.

We are the Overseers and Pastors of Our Report Ministries & Publications in Chicago, IL and the founders of Ky'Ijel Group Christian Academy (Homeschool Academy), and Christian Home Educators Support System (CHESS). These are evangelistic outreach ministries to serve and support the families in the City of Chicago and surrounding communities. We provide assistance and resources about home education, cooperative educational and recreational opportunities, curriculum guidance as well as **pertinent parental rights issues** and much more. Our mission is to empower parents to take back the responsibility of educating their children.

I am also the State Coordinator of Illinois for ParentalRights.org, a volunteer with Junior Achievement of Chicago and a member of UrbanCure Clergy Network. I also have over 19 years of entrepreneurial experience, with 14 of those years concentrated in the real estate industry with several certifications in Property Management and Non-profit Housing. I am also a recent graduate of Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, IL with a Bachelors' degree in Business Administration with a 4.0 GPA.

My husband and I both were born and raised in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. I spent 33 years

there before the time came for us to move to Chicago 7 ½ years ago. The move wasn't sudden. The Lord dealt with my husband six years or so prior in regards to us moving in order to expand our evangelistic work.

Proceeding to the life I now live, is nothing short of God's grace toward me. My grandmother, who only has a second-grade education, raised nine kids of her own, was a homeowner living in a poor black, drug infested neighborhood and raised me with my younger sister. Our mom was a young teenage mom, on drugs and in and out of prison. However, my grandmother was a strong hard-working woman, who showed tough love and amazing independent work ethic.

I basically grew up with all the typical black stigmas: the lack of motivation for education, promiscuous behavior, drugs, crime and some family members on welfare. In spite of the circumstances that surrounded my childhood, I was one that often fought against the odds. I had a love for education, never did drugs or committed a crime. However, I did fall into promiscuous behaviors and at the age of 17 I became a teenage mom.

This was a major turning point in my life. I will never forget the day I found out I was pregnant. I went into a Planned Parenthood in my neighborhood. I was devastated, frightened and scared. I was one of those kids who excelled in school, was popular, played sports, on the homecoming court, you name it, I was in it. Basically, I kept myself from a lot of the social norms and/or behaviors that surround the black communities. So becoming pregnant was embarrassing to me. I didn't want to be like the rest. I always strived for better and wanted to beat the social norms of the black community, I did not want to be another statistic.

While, awaiting the results of my pregnancy test, I was crying and thinking how I had ruined my life. When the nurse came back in the room with the test results, she began to tell me I was three weeks pregnant and consoled me that I had another choice. I had a choice to abort my baby. In that very moment, my life flashed before my eyes. I had to

make the biggest decision of my life. Do I get rid of my baby and proceed as normal, as though nothing happened? And go to my family and friends and continue to live out my life. Or do I live the rest of my life knowing that I had killed my child? Or do I keep my baby and face the challenges that lay ahead of me and press past the shame, regret and disappointments? I chose the latter.

I chose to do what I would always hear my grandmother say, “You make your bed hard you lied in it.” Her words rang loud in my heart and mind. Yes, my boyfriend and I did this. No one else is responsible for the choice we made. I must take responsibility for actions and live with it. Live the best life I possibly can, so I can give my child the best possible life. I must finish high school, go to college and make something of myself. I decided that in spite of my teenage pregnancy, I would still continue to press past the popularized social norms of the black community.

I worked hard, graduated from high school five months pregnant. During my teenage years, I worked at Burger King as part of my high school’s entrepreneurship program. However, after graduating from high school and becoming a mom, I found myself having to continue to work at Burger King to provide for my baby and myself. I lived with my grandmother for several months after I had my baby and was told to get on food stamps, receive WIC and childcare assistance. During this time, she also helped me to get my first apartment. After about nine months of renting, the real estate company asked me did I want to buy a house. I was shocked and excited! I went through the first time homebuyers program and purchased a 3 bedroom, 1 bath home at the age of 18.

After two years of being on food stamps, I found myself increasingly growing to hate the program. It was awful; the level of disrespect and deprivation was profoundly unbearable. I couldn’t take it any longer. I removed myself from the food stamp program. However, due to me working and going to school, I had to keep the child care assistance.

After having my baby September 1996, buying my home in August of 1997, my life took another interesting turn. I was offered a position at the real estate company who sold me

my home in 1998. I became the secretary, later the assistant rental manger, then in December 2005 I became a licensed real estate agent. However, from 1996 to early 2005 I was a single mom, working hard, even two jobs sometimes, going to college and was able to maintain honors.

By November 2004, I gave my life to Christ, met my husband at church in March 2005 and we got married October 8, 2005. After a year of becoming a Christian, I became an ordained minister. A year prior and during this time, the Lord began to deal with me very strongly about kids, building families and tackling problems that plague the black communities. I began, with purpose in my heart, to become that change and advocate for my family and my people.

In 2006, the Lord impressed upon my heart to take my daughter out of public education and began to give her a Christian education, by homeschooling her, so we did. We had no idea what this would entail; we just obeyed God and did it. My husband and I later opened up our own Christian homeschool academy in 2007 as an extension of our evangelistic work.

Then in October 2011, due to the Lord calling my husband to be planted in Chicago, the time came for us to move. He also has a very similar backstory, but has been able to persevere, showing great ingenuity and tenacity for overcoming the status quo challenges of being a black man. We did persevere and now we're here in this great city, Chicago, doing the work of the Lord. My husband and I purchased a home 3 years ago (2016); he has been the blessed owner of his own barbershop in the South Shore community for the last 5 years (2014); and we are continuing our Ministerial work and our Christian homeschool academy and Co-op group to support the families in the city of Chicago and surrounding community.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.