

Good Afternoon. Thank you, Chairman Booker and Ranking Member Cotton, for inviting me to tell my story. And thank you to my fellow panelists for your courage, and for being here today.

I appreciate the entire committee considering this issue and inviting me here as a witness. It's going to take all of us to fix this broken system that has damaged and upended so many lives.

My name is Breane Wingfield. I currently live in Dallas, Texas. I was raised in Los Angeles, California.

My story is no different from thousands of others.

At 14, I was hungry, poor, and alone, with only my grandmother around to raise me. We needed money just to go to McDonald's, and there was never enough to eat.

One day my friend and I stole a woman's purse at a laundromat. We ran off with it and turned the corner. When I looked inside the purse, I saw a pacifier and realized she had a baby. I made a mistake that day and took the money but insisted that we return the purse. We were arrested and charged with robbery. That woman came to our hearing and pleaded with the Judge to let us go. We were only 14 years old, starving and suffering, and just trying to survive in a system that was stacked against us.

I didn't think it could get much worse. I could have never expected what was to come.

I was first placed at Los Padrinos. Deputy Probation Officer De La Torre transported us and forced 2 girls to have sex in front of him in the van. He made me show him my breasts and touched them, kissed me on the mouth and made sexual comments. This also happened in the juvenile holding cell at the Compton (CA) Court House. Imagine being in a holding cell, as a child, awaiting your hearing and you are sexually assaulted. The fear was terrifying. I complied because I didn't want to receive a harsher sentence. That threat was always held over us.

Where were the supervisors? No one interfered or protected us. What kind of system works this way? An unlawful system.

I was then sent to Juvenile Probation Camp Joseph Scott in 2005, which was supposed to provide support and rehabilitation. Instead, I was sexually abused almost daily. A particular guard, Jeffrey Eckler, forced me to perform sexual acts with other young girls while he watched, and touched us. He leered at me while showering, always hiding behind his sunglasses. These are examples of the horrific abuse I endured at Camp Scott.

I couldn't tell anyone, for fear of punishment or retribution. I didn't know who I could turn to and report the abuse. We were never offered any type of support. We were never told who we could report the abuse to or make formal complaints.

Even the female guards participated and turned a blind eye to the brazen abuse inside those walls. It didn't feel like there was anywhere to turn, or that anyone was safe. Guards would offer some girls treats or other benefits if they complied with sexual demands and orders. We were threatened that refusals would result in more punishment.

The abuse was sexual and deeply psychological. I was terrified every minute of every day, and just wanted to be released. To go home. I did what I needed to do to survive.

I was just a child. All of us who have spent time at these camps will never be the same again. We were promised at Camp Scott that we would be protected.

But all the girls experienced rape and sexual assault. No one was protected and every single one of us was abused in ways you cannot imagine, and that still haunt us. It was a nightmare that I've never been able to shake. These were not rehabilitation camps; they were nothing more than concentration camps.

I've worked hard to move on from the abuse, violence and suffering. I've devoted myself to my work as a substitute teacher. But just like before, I am fighting back against a system stacked against me. Because I am not a full-time employee, I have not been able to get access to health insurance. I do not have a therapist. In moments where I have not seen a way out, I've had to call crisis hotline after hotline, grasping at anything to keep me alive.

Though I've worked hard to build a life beyond Camp Scott, I carry this weight with me everywhere I go. It's hung over me for decades.

But being here, telling my story, gives me some hope. This investigation is long overdue, because the Prison Rape Elimination Act of 2003 isn't being enforced. It isn't working. It's not enough. Countless women and girls are still being raped, abused and violated in every way possible. Each day that goes by is another day where this cycle of suffering continues. I think of the young girls incarcerated as we sit here right now, this very moment, and know in my heart that they are still not safe.

You all have the power to protect us; to protect all girls and women. I am asking you today to not only listen to our stories, but to do something about it.

Thank you.