

April 23, 2019

Peter Gallotta, Corresponding Secretary  
San Francisco Democratic Party  
100 Broadway  
San Francisco, CA 94114



Dear Mr. Gallotta,

This evolving effort to legislate against hitting children requires thoughtful discussion about the impact on vulnerable populations, including traumatized poor communities and minorities, especially African Americans. As a white mother of black children, I have learned the hard way to have a healthy and cautious relationship with law enforcement as it relates to my children. Understandably, many of us will find the idea of a spanking ban alarming. Thankfully, my daughter does not spank her children. But let's imagine for a moment that there is a ban. Let's imagine that my daughter became overwhelmed and spanked her child or was accused of doing so, and she was reported to law enforcement. The thought of it chills me to my core. I am sure I am not alone.

I am aware that we live in a culture that applauds with a chorus of media attention and passionate approval when a black woman hits her son in public to correct his behavior. I am aware that our culture actively condones the hitting of children, especially black children. I am aware that we live in an environment of well-documented racial inequality, relentless racial injustice in the penal system, and nonexistent parenting resources for the poor.

And yet, I am also aware that 5 children die every day in the US due to child maltreatment, most at the hands of their own parents. I am aware that every year nearly 3.4 million children receive an investigation/response from child protective services. I am also aware that the majority of child abuse is unreported.

Parents who spank have more involvement with child protective services, are 4-9X more likely to meet criteria for substantiated child abuse, and defend themselves against child abuse charges using "attempt to discipline" 75% of the time. Attempt to discipline. Our society conflates violence against children with discipline. Our willingness to condone the hitting of children perpetuates child abuse itself. We as a society are implicated in these crimes.

Ensuring legal protection of my grandchildren, your children and grandchildren, impoverished children, marginalized children, and minority children is our moral obligation. We must move forward to protect the rights of children to be free from violence if we are serious about ending child abuse.

Imagine a world where children are respected. Where children flourish in the safety of their parents' warmth and protection. Where children recognize violence as something not to endure, but something to resist. Where children possess the courage necessary to lead with moral conviction, because they were not forced to simply submit to authority. Where children learn to respect themselves and others, by the respect they are given; and learn to extend care to those in need, by the way they receive care; and stand up for what is right and what is good, in the same way that we stand up for what is right and what is good.

Hitting our children is not right. It is harmful. We must stand up and challenge it. We must do what is right and good on behalf of our children, we must prevent child abuse, and we must have the courage to do it now.

**Robbyn Peters Bennett, LPC, CMHS**

Early Childhood Trauma Specialist  
623 NE Tillamook Street  
Portland, OR 97212  
(360) 325 - 3095  
<https://stopspanking.org/robbypetersbennett/>

*Robbyn is a psychotherapist specializing in the treatment of children suffering from the effects of early abuse and neglect. She is also the founder of StopSpanking.org, which is an online educational resource for parents, clinicians and educators that shares the research on the risk of spanking, and offers peaceful, neurodevelopmentally appropriate methods of disciplining children.*