

March 25, 2016

The Honorable Nikki R. Haley

Office of the Governor

1205 Pendleton St.

Columbia, SC 29201

Dear Governor Haley,

My name is Lana Cortshell. I am a stay at home mother of 5 children. My husband and I adopted our oldest 3 from Greenville County. Our oldest son, Peter, who is now 15, is the subject of this letter.

Peter came to live with us in March of 2004 at the age of 4 ½. He had some ear issues; he could not hear well, had a hard time talking and we could only understand the words "Mama" and "Dadda". This made him a very quiet and nervous little boy, but he soon blossomed into a thriving, sweet and typical boy. About a year later at about age 5 ½ we started noticing that he was leaving the "honeymoon" stage which the caseworkers had told us he would be in for a while. We also found out about a month after we acquired Peter, that he had 2 sisters that the DSS had separated him from and had neglected to tell us about. At first his behavior suggested that he was just testing us to see what he could get away with. It started with fits of temper, stealing and lying about small things and also talking back and having to be told numerous times to follow our instructions. It began to escalate and got to the point where we needed help for Peter.

At about age 6 we began seeking counseling for him and at a foster care meeting, we met the couple who adopted Peter's sisters. We became close friends and agreed to keep to keep the kids in touch, as we lived close to each other. After this we learned more of Peter's past: he was neglected by his birth parents who were abusers of drugs and alcohol; the only security had been the sisters he was separated from; his older sister, Faith, became a mother figure to him in his first three years of life. Over the years he has developed an unhealthy obsession over this older sister.

The first attempt at counseling didn't work out; the counselor couldn't get him to sit down and talk. He suggested that maybe we go through a parenting course that he thought might help; which we did attend. Peter's behavior was not improving: he was held back in 1st grade because the teachers couldn't get him to sit and focus; he was immature for his age; his grades were far below average. At this time, we started him on the medication "intuniv" and there was an amazing change; his grades and behavior began to improve at school.

At home we were still seeing behavior issues which continued to get worse. Over the next 2 years Peter would have uncontrollable fits of rage where he would throw chairs, curse at me and rip moldings off door frames and use them as weapons. He would even attack me when I was driving. Numerous times I would need to call someone over to the house and help me get him under control. We searched for counselors numerous times without success, as no one knew what was wrong and how to help. My

husband's parents, who live in New Hampshire, offered to take him for 6 weeks one summer to give us a break and focus on our other kids at home.

Finally, in 2009, I reached out to Post Legal Adoptions to get some help. After reviewing the situation and looking at different options, I suggested a camp that a friend of mine worked at and had high praises for the outcomes of the program. Peter went through a psychological evaluation and it was recommended that he be placed outside the home because of his issues. We enrolled him in Fairplay Wilderness Camp School in Westminster, SC in January of 2011. He seemed to adjust well there and we felt we were heading in the right direction. Then in the spring of 2011, Peter's grandfather in New Hampshire passed away. Peter was very close to him, so that was a back step for him. Camp Fairplay allowed him to attend the funeral, after which he returned to Camp to process it. Peter was doing well at Camp and graduated from speech therapy that was part of his IEP; everyone involved felt he was ready to come home. He graduated from Camp Fairplay in October of 2012. We had family counseling lined up to help adjust to home life and it went well for a few months.

Peter then began acting worse than before; his doctor then set him up with Greer Mental Health to be evaluated. The counselors suspected he was bipolar and the doctor prescribed medication for ODD and ADHD. It was difficult to get the medication right; he was physically aggressive toward me and our other children; cursing, stealing and had the attitude that he need not listen to his parents. We then had a meeting with Post Legal Adoptions, Greer Mental Health and his counselors to discuss possible treatment options. It was concluded that Peter had RADS and no medication was available for this; he continued with his medication to help control his fits of rage. They suggested that my husband and I attend counseling to deal with it. We tried the counseling for a couple of sessions, but discontinued when they recommended that we give Peter whatever he wanted so as not to provoke him to anger, but still maintain normal rules for our other kids. We disagreed with this approach.

In 2013 we stopped seeing Greer Mental Health and found All About Change, a psychological counseling service in Taylors, SC and they set Peter up with a counselor and BI Services and also referred him to Springbrook Behavioral Hospital with Dr. Fisher. Dr. Fisher tried to adjust medications and add new medications to no avail. He concluded Peter had bipolar 2 disorder with RADS. At this point I begged Dr. Fisher to admit Peter as I could no longer physically and emotionally deal with him. My other children were being affected; they learned to lock themselves in a bedroom and call 911 when Peter went into a rage. They had to live with fear and not feeling safe and to witness their mother being physically abused by their brother. Peter had to be removed from the home by the county sheriff and an ambulance on several occasions.

Post Legal Adoptions finally started looking for outside placement in October of 2014 when the situation became critical. During this time, we had 2 suspicious fires in our home; the first one, which damaged our dining room, we know Peter was responsible for. After that fire, Dr. Fisher prescribed a sleeping medication and we installed motion detectors to detect if Peter left his bedroom at night. Shortly after, Peter attempted to commit suicide and was brought to the ER. On occasion, his BI would be at the house until midnight trying to calm him. On May 15, 2015 we had another house fire which rendered the house unlivable. We temporarily lived in a camper and tents with my parents until we could find a suitable place until we could rebuild our home.

At this point, Post Legal Adoptions had been trying for 4 months to find placement for Peter. He was also receiving 35 hours of BI services per week and seeing a counselor. During our stay at my parents'

home, they would take the other boys into the locked house for nights while my husband, I and the 2 young children stayed in a camper in the back yard. Peter slept in a tent next to us. Peter continued his bad behavior; he would approach me with knives, run down the street and curse at my husband. He returned from a weekend visit with his sister smelling of tobacco and we suspect he had also used drugs.

After 5 months, Post Legal Adoptions found a group home in Columbia that accepted Peter and in July of 2015 he settled in there. During his stay he discontinued all of his medications, he wasn't properly supervised, was often on social media, stealing and contacting his sisters and his relatives in Ohio. He also pierced his own ears and cried sexual abuse on 2 occasions, without any apparent consequences from his caregivers. At Thanksgiving time, the group home insisted that Peter come home for the weekend to see if he would be ready to return to home life. Against my better judgement, I agreed to take him home and I picked him up on a Wednesday and planned to return him to the group home the following Saturday. The house we were living in didn't have a safe area for the other children if Peter went into one his rages and the 2 older boys didn't feel safe. We had them spend the night with friends. My husband and I and our 2 youngest children locked ourselves in our bedroom for the night for safety.

Now this is the point where I am pleading for help. We have been so wronged by the system; the DSS is not protecting us and our rights, Peter is not being helped and we are being punished. We need this to stop and for someone to step in before this gets anymore out of control.

While Peter was home for the Thanksgiving weekend, he threatened me, he threatened his sisters' adoptive mother Marie and stole an I-phone from an elderly friend of ours. We tried to get him into the car to return him to Columbia but he ran away. I called the group home and they suggested that I call the paramedics to get him sedated so we could get transport him. By the time the sheriff's deputies arrived, he was nowhere to be found. He was on the run for 29 hours before they caught up with him. The deputies handcuffed him and instructed my husband to gas up the car and make ready to bring him to Columbia after they de-cuff him and place him in the car. My husband and my father then left for Columbia, but Peter jumped from the car at the first red light and went on the run again after they chased him in vain. I found him later that night about 15 miles from where escaped. The deputies came and transported him to DJJ custody. At the first 30-day court hearing in December, 2015 Peter was still not on medication. The judge was aware of it immediately and we said that Peter needs help before it is safe to bring him home.

Peter's biological aunt and uncle from Ohio, Gary and Julie, were willing and desired to take Peter. They were present at the hearing and would have taken him that day. The judge ordered him back to Greenville County DJJ custody to be evaluated and returned to his medications and also to have a home study done at Gary and Julie's home in Ohio before Peter could be released. In January, 2016 at the second court hearing, the DSS still did not have the home study done and Peter was still not on his medications. We told the judge that because of our house fire, we didn't have the means to keep everyone safe and could not take Peter home until he had the proper help, which the aunt and uncle were willing to do. Instead of sending him to Ohio, as we wished, they took him into DSS custody and ordered the home study the second time. Then the DSS started an investigation against us for child abandonment! Peter was sent to another group home in Charleston. While he was there he was back on social media and stole another phone, for which we had to pay \$500.

Peter went before the judge in February, 2016 and pleaded guilty to his DJJ charges and was sent to Union, SC Upstate Evaluation center. They finally started him on one of his medications on the last

week he was there. He finished his time in Union and had another court date set for March 23, 2016. By this time my husband and I had completed the required documents to transfer custody to his aunt and uncle in Ohio in hopes that when he was released from Union he would be able to go there. The judge would not allow the transfer, as the home study ordered by the DSS was yet again not done. At this time, they are trying to find another group home for Peter and the DSS is still trying to charge us with abandonment!

Hereby is my dilemma; we have been trying for almost 10 years to help and do right for this child. We want nothing but the best for him, but he has far too many emotional issues that need to be addressed before we can we can work on his mental state of mind. He wants to be with his biological family and we are willing so they can help him work out the questions he has. Gary and Julie have a part time job and school lined up for Peter as well as proper accommodations in their home. The DSS is just making his issues worse by bouncing him from group home to group home. We were also told by DSS after they took Peter into custody that they would have a meeting with us and our lawyer to discuss what needs to be done. They also were supposed to send someone out to talk to our other kids to understand their feelings about Peter being at home. Neither one of these happened. We believe he needs to be taken out of the DSS custody and sent to Ohio to get the help he needs.

We have documentation of everything we have done to help him over the years. We also have copies of Peter's Facebook conversations where he planned everything and threatened to kill Marie, his sisters' adoptive mother and to call someone to "take care" of me.

I just do not understand what the DSS is trying to accomplish. I am pleading for help to straighten this out and allow my child to go to Ohio before he does something more serious. I am just asking for a little help. Thank you for taking the time to read this long letter. I am looking forward to hearing from you. My email address is: boysandgal@gmail.com and mailing address is 200 Langley Rd, Travelers Rest, SC 29690.

May God Bless You,

Lana Corthell

Cc:

James Mikell Burns

100 Old Locust Hill Rd.

Taylors, SC 29687