August 31, 2010

Dear Arizona NAACP,

I am writing today as a Child & Family Advocate of 35 years here in Phoenix, Arizona. I am trying desperately to come to personal grips with the fact that black children in Arizona in the year 2010 can be systematically abused and discriminated against and the NAACP does nothing substantial to take action against this.

The black population in Arizona is 8% and yet 34% of the children in Foster Care are black. This means that because my best friend Darrell is a black man that there is a more than 4 times greater chance that his children will be taken before mine are taken by the State of Arizona.

Then once his daughter is taken by the State of Arizona there is a 20% greater chance that his daughter will be abused in that Foster Care home than if she would have been left at home.

I try to imagine my daughter D’vonne at four years old. Then I try to imagine if Child Protective Services would take her away and place her with a black family of a different religion, different culture, different rules, and different expectations. Then I try to imagine her calling this man “Daddy” and this man’s wife being called “Mommy”. Then I try to imagine her telling my Mother and my Father that she has “two daddies” and “two mommies”.

Then I try to imagine the fear she would feel throughout the day. I try to imagine being man enough to control myself knowing that she is in 20% greater risk to be abused in this Foster Home and there is not a single thing that I can do about any of this.

I try to imagine what I would do knowing that there is not a single substantiated piece of evidence that I had ever done anything wrong to my precious daughter in her entire life.

I try to imagine how Child Protective Services could take and keep my daughter for months and even years without any proof or substantiated evidence.

I try to imagine that when they took my precious four year old D’vonne that they took her to a hospital and had people poke and prod and explore her body searching her for any signs they could use to justify taking her and keeping her from me. The Child Protective Services worker questioning her, prodding her, asking her abstract things that she does not have the developmental capability to respond to without assistance?

Then I try to imagine the Child Protective Services worker taking her to one of the child abuse centers here in the valley and repeating this physical examination and verbal interview. Making her feel like she is not believed at four years of age? Two interviews? Two physicals? Would she begin to cry, or withdraw or isolate when she thinks they do not believe her by making her answer the same questions over and over again?

Would my four year old D’vonne begin to question my love for her, my dedication for her? Would the Child Protective Service worker tell her how I am working 10 to 12 hours a day seven days a week to get the money to hire an attorney that is competent enough to challenge the designed legal mechanisms that will discredit and attack me at every turn regardless of my innocence or hers?

I try to imagine if I could handle all this as a man? Could I handle organizations turning a deaf ear to me? Could I handle an organization founded to protect people and “advance” the condition of people of my color of skin turning away from me? Could I have the emotional strength to listen to Dr. Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech knowing that my child is four times more likely to be taken from me because of the color of my skin?

Would the people I was taught to admire growing up turn their back on me? Would Abraham Lincoln, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., John F. Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, Rosa Parks, or Frederick Douglas turn away from me in ear damaging silence?

Did my school Teachers all lie to me? Are we all not created equal by our creator? Do we all not have certain unalienable rights such as life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness? Does the color of my skin really give me a different set of laws and standards of which to live by or by which people may treat me differently?

Am I not to be judged by the content of my character and not by the color of my skin? Why then is my friend Darrell treated differently than I am treated? Please, please tell me, explain this to me like I am four years old?

Steven R. Isham M.A., L.B.S.W.

isham623@aol.com