

**From:** Jeannine M. Talbot  
**Sent:** Thursday, March 27, 2014 3:57 PM  
**To:** Jud Testimony  
**Subject:** RB 494 -- Support in part -- Do not support in part

I write to voice my support of the recommendations made by the majority of the Task Force to Study Legal Disputes Involving the Care and Custody of Minor Children. I also support the recommendations supported by the Family Law Section of the Connecticut Bar Association.

I specifically do not support Section 1(b) that does not provide for immediate appointment of counsel or a Guardian ad Litem (GAL) in restraining orders and ex-parte application situations. Especially in such cases, children need their best interests protected and someone to perhaps, speak for them. Further, I do not support Section 4 that allows litigants the opportunity to remove an unlimited number of GALs appointed in his/her case. Doing so would allow litigants the opportunity to file motions to remove every personal available and qualified to act as a Guardian ad Litem that does not agree with him/her. I do not support Section 5(1) making state rates mandatory in any case where the children ever received HUSKY benefits. Like everyone else, those that take on the role of GAL or AMC (attorney for minor children), need to make a living and pay their bills. My experience has been that most GALs/AMCs, already charge reduced rates, take on several state rate cases, and accept pro bono assignments. They work long hours and agonize over the recommendations they make. In Section 5(b) "College savings account" needs to be specifically defined and I do not support it as written. In Sections 5 (c) and (d) AMC/GAL fees should not be reduced or changed without regard for the litigants' resources and what they pay their own attorneys. Again, those assigned to cases as GAL or AMC must also make a living. Why should litigants be allowed to pay thousands to their own attorneys and retain their other resources when someone that is often called, emailed and otherwise communicated to by both parties, attends all hearings and court dates, and does home visits, witness exchanges of children, and does countless other tasks expected of the GAL/AMC in each case. GAL/AMC should be justly compensated along with the attorneys representing the parties.

I have been a practicing attorney since 1993. I am also a Certified Mediator. I limit my practice to family law matters in Litchfield Judicial District. I am frequently appointed as Guardian Ad Litem in contested custody cases. Representing children is one of the most rewarding aspects of my practice. It is also by far the most frustrating and least profitable aspects of my practice. I often reduce my hourly rate, charge \$40 or \$50 per hour, and accept pro-bono appointments. Home visits, parent meetings, and meetings with my wards are often done in the evenings or weekends. I believe children of divorcing parents need someone to look out for them – and sometimes to be their voice. Often the parties are so wrapped up in the battle against each other, they forget about the needs of their children. The children often become pawns to one or the other parents.

The information I've seen and heard recently in the media and presented to the Task Force is appalling. I noticed that not one of the stories was told by a divorced (or divorcing) couple – it was one side or the other of a case. Additionally, when researching the cases on the judicial website, the number of motions filed in these cases was staggering. Guardians Ad Litem must attend all court hearings involving the children. Even when charging reduced fees, Guardians Ad Litem must be compensated for the work they do.

I know the system is not perfect – nor are the people serving as Guardians Ad Litem. It is my hope the recommendations made by the Task Force majority will begin to improve the imperfect system and assist those parents involved in custody disputes and their children.

I thank you for your consideration.

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