

Testimony ON RAISED BILL NO. 494

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Wallingford, CT

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Good morning/afternoon. Thank you very much for the opportunity to address this committee. My name is Jean-Pierre Bolat. I've been a lifelong resident of Connecticut since 1965...except between 1983 and 2007...as I was serving our country abroad in the United States Navy. I will not belabor the point that my divorce was any worse than many of the men and women here today, but I will add, for the record, that I am currently still in about \$230,000 of debt...all due to family circumstances and the high price of the divorce industry. As I tell my friends daily, "I wouldn't wish this upon my worst enemy." Since 2010 until exactly one year ago, I was mostly unemployed and drained all of my life's savings to save my children from a very bad situation. Fortunately, one year ago, I regained employment and I am slowly chipping away at my divorce-induced debt. I mention this because I had to take a day of vacation from my job in order to testify. I also have to take vacation each time I have to go back to court to defend against this absurdity. I don't know what will happen when my vacation runs out...and I'm sure my bosses are not happy with continued absence due to family court. I know others here today have it much worse as some have lost their jobs. So why have I started my testimony in this manner? I just want you all to understand that we are all struggling to make ends meet...for our children to have a better life; but, the system in which we are trapped is so dysfunctional and directly impacts the very people it claims to protect...our children...by unethically stripping us of our ability to give them a better life.

As a businessman, I understand the virtue of making money and running a profitable business. Profit pays for our healthcare. Profit puts food on the table. Profit pays for clothes or cars. And as a businessman, I want to make as much money as possible in an honest and forthright fashion so that I can give that money away...to my Pastor who has supported me in these tough times, to repay loans to my friends and parents, or to take my kids on a vacation longer than an overnight in a hotel a couple miles away from home. But, you know something? I will not do it dishonestly. And even if I wanted to be dishonest, we have rules, regulations, and laws to keep most businesses in check, don't we? We have the SEC which monitors our investment and trading activities. We have the Department of Justice & the EPA. We have the FEC and state regulations governing campaign financing. We have the Truth in Negotiations Act, the Better Business Bureau, and the RICO statutes. Yet, when it comes to the divorce industry, there is no oversight, and the victims are not just victimized because of ignorance (I'm one of them) or naiveté (yup, me again). We are unwittingly stripped of our Constitutional rights each and every time we are ordered to pay for services we do not want, do not need, or can't afford. I firmly believe in "*caveat emptor (let the buyer beware)*", and if I do not like the service at a barber shop, convenience store, car dealer, or restaurant, I am within my rights to never patronize those places ever again...and nobody can force me to do so. Yet, the Divorce & GAL industry is the only industry in America where we are forced, under penalty of incarceration and attachment of wages, to pay for something we do not want and do not need, at rates that are NOT regulated, NOT monitored for fraud, NOT fair by any standard, and NOT accountable under any Truth in Negotiations Act or Generally Accepted

Accounting Principles. This abuse of our rights must end. I want to leave you with several excerpts of reality:

1. In 2011, after I paid my 2nd attorney over \$80,000, he walked out on me because I would not sell my parents' home and put them out on the street...that was one month before my trial. I finished the divorce "Pro Se", and when negotiating the settlement with the GAL and my wife's attorney, they both pressured me as follows:

- 1st, when dividing up assets, they both "misrepresented" to me that the marital debt all had to be carried by me...but the last of my military investment fund had to be split evenly...and then my share was to pay off the GAL. YUP, I fell for that one.
- 2nd, they also pressured me to declare bankruptcy, "Everybody does it...it is the American way...let me know and I can introduce you to a good lawyer..." ...as they knew they would be the 1st to be paid off. I didn't fall for that one...but my debt to income ratio is so bad that I can't get a loan to buy a house or get a credit card.

My second example is more recent...just a few weeks ago. As my ex-wife wanted to move out of town to live near her boyfriend, she filed to change the parenting plan, and once again, the Judge refused to hear any argument at all until a GAL was assigned...and yes, I wouldn't agree to splitting up my three children and allowing my daughter to be taken away from her brothers and myself to live solely with her mother an hour away. The first question the GAL asked me was, "So, are you back on your feet...great...how much do you make?" When we arrived in court, the first thing he did was hand me a bill for over \$7,000. And, yes, he charges \$350 per hour, and yes, I've been ordered to pay.

In closing, I ask this body, each of you who has raised his or her hand as I have, and sworn to uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States; I ask each of you to live up to that oath today. Stop the unconstitutional seizure of our property through judicial whim and eliminate GALs except where absolutely necessary; and, allow our children the rights to be parented equally by both parents. Thank you for your time.