

Members

TESTIMONY FOR PUBLIC HEARING

The Task Force to Study Legal Disputes Involving the Care & Custody of Minor Children
Connecticut Legislature
c/o Legislative Judiciary Committee Office
Legislative Office Building/Office 2500
Hartford, CT 06106

Thursday, January 9, 2014

Dear Task Force Members:

GAL CATASTROPHY

I am here today not only as an observer, but as an interested party. I have been dating my girlfriend, Marisa, for over 7 years and have sat with her in family court for every hearing since 2006, a total of 23 times.

I have witnessed judges substitute both Marisa's and her ex-husband's rights for an open trial, with the appointment of not one, but two Guardian ad litem along with a parade of so-called experts.

Like all of us with children, Marisa and her ex-husband had interviewed and ultimately picked their children's doctor, dentist, etc. As parents it is up to them alone to decide who interacts with their children.

Marisa and her ex-husband were not given a pool of GAL's to choose from, nor a chance to vet any persons that were supposed to be working on behalf of their children.

As ex-spouses they may not get along, but they are not criminals. Why was the court allowed to take away their parental rights in choosing whomever they believe will represent their children's interests best?

The first GAL on Marisa's case was appointed to for a term of 2 years at a billing rate of \$450.00 per hour. She stayed on the case for 4 years and her total billing was in excess of \$71,000.

During her 4 years the first GAL recommended co-parenting counselors, which the court approved. Three of them came and went at a cost of over \$17,000. Next the GAL recommended a family forensic psychological evaluation at a cost of \$12,000, which the court also approved.

Two months later the GAL resigned.

Of particular note, during her 4-year time on the case the first GAL met with Marisa's children exactly 1 time.

18 Months later, a new GAL, recommended by Marisa's ex-husband's attorney, was appointed. She

required a retainer of \$7,500 up front. Her hourly rate is \$300.00.

The new GAL immediately recommended individual therapy for Marisa, her ex-husband and their 13-year-old son. Of course the court approved this recommendation.

The cost of the three new therapists was over \$3,500.

Of particular note, in 2 years the new GAL has met with Marisa's children exactly 1 time.

The fact of the matter is that there was no need in the first place to appoint a GAL for Marisa's and her ex-husbands children. Neither parent is a criminal. The children were never in danger and they were not abused or neglected, they were doing well in school and both by all accounts were pretty well adjusted normal kids.

The only damage done to the children was the effect from the exorbitant financial cost associated with the appointment of the GALs. In essence, the family court gave a huge pile of money that could have gone towards college or summer camp or ballet or even sometimes food in the house, to 2 "Guardians" whom in 6 years time met Marisa's children only 1 time each.

Marisa's GAL bills along with the other court ordered bills, all recommended by the GALs, far outweighed her income and savings and ultimately pushed her into having to file for bankruptcy.

What's really criminal here is that the GAL bills that were the driving factor of the bankruptcy are exempt from bankruptcy protection, they still have to be paid in full.

Anonymous #3