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Task Force Committee
Legislative Office Building, 300 Capitol Ave., Hartford, CT 06106

RE: Improving the Family Court

My hope is to not go over the 3 minutes but with almost 2 decades of experience, extensive training in Marriage and Family Therapy/Professional Counseling along with taking our state's Guardian Ad Litem program, and helping families affected by the family courts for 18 years, I have much to say.

We are here for what is in the best interest of the children. How is constantly fighting in court in their best interest? We get that one parent or both are still filled with anger, hatred and rage. But that is not for the courts to deal with. That is for therapy and a therapist to deal with. We are here for what is in the best interest of the children.

Which brings me to our Task Force Issues. There are extensive GAL problems starting with few if any new GALs being hired. Judges claim that new GAL's do not have enough experience. To this problem, I suggest that the newly trained GAL's be allowed to shadow the present GAL's. It provides them experience and the judge a chance to get to know and see how they work.

Additionally, of the approximately 1500 GAL's in CT, only 100 are State Rated. This is not because we do not like the contract, but because we were turned down to be contracted at the state rate. And those 100 are all attorneys.

With this said, I strongly believe that GAL's should NOT be attorneys. They do not have enough training or experience in psychology, marriage and family therapy and let alone child psychology. Psycho 101 does NOT qualify someone to work with families or kids at this level, nor does our State Training program with it's limited 30 hours. And they are charging outrageous amounts.

Furthermore, it is too easy for there to be a conflict of interest. When a GAL who is an attorney is involved with a case where one of the attorneys for the parents is also a GAL on the side, they may fear going against that parents attorney because that attorney when hired as a GAL on their private case might go against their client. To avoid this issue, it would be better if GAL's were not attorneys and then there can be no improprieties or chances for an accusation of it. This way, we can make sure that the GAL's are specially trained in MFT, PC, child psychology and/or have extensive experience.

Which brings me to my next point. Parents should not have to choose between paying to fight for their children's rights in court or putting food and shelter over their heads. Parents should not have to work 2 and 3 jobs just to pay for child support and legal fees or court costs that they are so exhausted, they cannot even provide quality time with their children. Family Court and being a parent should not be about affording to fight for the children's rights to have a

relationship with their parent. And this is why I created a Program called 3 Strikes Your OUT!

This 12-week program gives each parent 3 chances to comply with the courts orders. It can be tailored as needed but the point is to keep the children from being dragged for years through hell and back by a parent who refuses to cooperate, co-parent, or exhibits extreme gate keeping known as parental alienation. I challenge the courts and legislature to pilot this program and see if it will help solve much of the extensive damages to the children.

The next few topics I will touch on briefly, as I feel my colleague, Linda Gottlieb and others will have more time to expound on these.

As far as shared custody issues, parents bring the children into this world together, they should put them through this world together and worse case scenario take them out of this world together. Our courts have made it such a monetary prize to have primary custody of the children, so much so that parents are being pushed out of their children's lives when the presumption should be shared joint custody, barring any true and substantiated charges of abuse or neglect.

As to counseling, it is absolutely mandatory that the entire family be in counseling. But it must be specialized counseling that involves not only individual counseling for each parent and child but also therapy with each child by himself or herself with each parent. The parent-child dynamics are essential to understanding what is really going on. Children should also not be seen together as they feed off of each other and fear being tattled on by a sibling to one of the parents. Children should also never in the beginning be put in a counseling session with both parents especially if there is alienation. This puts the child in a very dangerous situation emotionally and mentally as they must either lie or face the wrath of the aggressive parent.

And for those that claim that Medical Insurance does NOT cover counseling, this is a fallacy. Family Therapy, of any kind, is covered by most insurance, even if it is court ordered. Just like substance abuse counseling is often court ordered, and covered, so is Family Therapy.

As to psych evaluations, they are often absolutely useless when it comes to high conflict divorce. Unless the evaluator is fully knowledgeable about all the dynamics and extensively trained in psychological abuse damages from Parental Alienation. it is too easy to mistake a natural normal response of fear and paranoia as something more than it is. And worse, the aggressive parent is often narcissistic, and knows exactly how to pass these tests, thus fooling the evaluator to believe they are near perfect.

So in conclusion, as I have said to my daughter for many years, I may not condone everything you do, but I ask you to be responsible. In this case, I may not condone everything the task force proposes, what I ask is that you be responsible and willing to work with us to create a better family court system for the children and their parents and to consider the tools, charts and programs I have developed to help stop the snowball effect of extreme gate keeping and improperly trained professionals in the court system.

Regards,

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