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Kreitler, Jim

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To: Kreitler, Jim

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

Thank you for allowing me to speak before you today. My name is James S. Kreitler, and I am here today to share my experience as a father who is dealing with alienation from my kids. Let me first start by stating the following: I recognize that these issues are highly emotional, with wounded feelings and a lot of anger on both sides. Divorce is by nature difficult and highly charged. It is, after all, the death of a family. My purpose here is not to substitute emotion and anger for a reasoned approach to the problem of parent alienation. My purpose is simply to communicate to the Task Force, through my experiences, the fundamental idea that kids need both parents in their lives, and to offer a couple of ideas towards a solution. I hope we can all agree that kids have the best opportunity to live a full and happy life when they are loved and nurtured by both parents having an active presence in their lives, and let this simple yet powerful notion guide the work of the Task Force.

Here is my story:

My divorce was finalized in September 2010. My ex-wife and I have joint legal custody, and according to the divorce decree she has the kids for 18 nights out of every 28 day cycle, and I have 10. I also get one dinner per week. We both live in Fairfield, CT.

My ex-wife and I started to have significant financial conflict in late 2012, when I inquired about her boyfriend co-habiting with her at her residence, and the financial support that by all appearances he was giving to her and the kids. I also requested 50/50 parenting time. Irrespective of the facts or merits of her position or mine on these matters, there is no way any of these issues should have been aired in front of the kids, or discussed with them. At the time, the kids ranged in age between 18 and 11. My ex-wife did air our disagreements with the kids, and as a result, my then 16 year old son announced to me on January 15, 2013 that he was not going to stay at my house anymore. My then 14 year old daughter followed suit on January 24, 2013 by walking out of the house that night (and being picked up by her mother's boyfriend). Specifically, my ex-wife told the kids that Dad was "suing" her and trying to ruin her financially. She told them she could not afford our son's tuition at a special school he was attending at the time due to Dad trying to come after her financially. This is from a person who had purchased a new home in November 2012 for \$800,000 while still owning the marital residence I had deeded over to her which was

worth another \$900,000. She also found the money to go on vacation numerous times in 2013 with her boyfriend and the kids to locales such as Mexico (twice), Florida and elsewhere.

I went from seeing my kids as much as the divorce agreement allowed, to going for over six months without seeing my now 15 year old daughter and five months without seeing my son. During that time, I missed several important events in their lives, and included a phone call my daughter placed to me telling me not to contact her again.

I tried to hire a parenting coordinator to somehow improve how we worked together. We have a signed court order but she blew off that process after only a few weeks, with no penalty.

I am reduced to texting my kids and in essence begging to get together for dinner or other short visits, and take whatever time I can get. My ex-wife has created alliances with the kids by lavishing them with material things and giving them undue freedom as to where they are and who they are with, in exchange for pitying her and excluding me. I find out about things like a sports injury when I get the bill a month later from the radiologist's office.

The bottom line is that my kids need both parents. My kids do not have that. They have something much less, and an arrangement that will possibly damage them in the future and which is allowed by our legal system.

But there is one part of the divorce agreement that the legal system sees as inviolable; that is my obligation to pay alimony and otherwise uphold all of my responsibilities under the divorce agreement, which I do. My ex-wife can damage the kids by alienating me from them and there is no penalty the legal system appears willing to hand out. I tried to find a remedy in court and it cost me \$60,000 and I got nowhere. She used the court system to run out the clock on my role as father. Her tactics gave her time to fully insinuate herself with the kids, which rendered my attempts to gain more parenting time worthless as a practical matter. And yet, if I were to flout my responsibilities under the agreement, I would be penalized swiftly and severely. It is a completely asymmetrical legal system and leaves the kids bereft of an extremely important person in their lives.

In closing, my hope is that the Task Force can make recommendations for 50/50 default parenting arrangements, rather than through outdated and antiquated notions, based on precedent or biology, about which parent should be the primary caregiver. Further, lawyers, GALs and others should be held to a standard of conduct and care matching that of any of the highest professions such as doctors, so that decisions can be made with the utmost respect for the kids, rather than for other reasons. Instead, parental anger and "winning" are allowed and indeed encouraged to drive the process,

and encourages using the kids as weapons against the other parent. The more we take the divorce and the parenting process out of the current adversarial legal format and more into a mandatory mediative/ therapeutic format, the better off the kids will be.

Thank you.

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