

Testimony of Sara Ogle

Educator and Volunteer Advocate for Parents and Survivors of Domestic Violence in Family Court

Chair, members of the committee, thank you for hearing my testimony today.

My name is Sara Ogle. I'm an Oregon public school teacher with 21 years of experience working with children. I'm also a volunteer advocate for protective parents—often mothers—who face the family court system, often without attorneys, while trying to shield their children from abuse.

Here's what I've learned: when a child discloses abuse, there should be a clear path to protection. But in Oregon family court, there is not. Instead, children are funneled into what is called the "alienation pipeline"—a system where attorneys, therapists, custody evaluators, parenting coordinators, parenting supervisors and reunification "experts" attach themselves to family court cases, taking advantage of the conflict to collect exorbitant fees, while no one takes responsibility for actually protecting the child.

When a child or protective parent alleges abuse— everyone charged with protecting the child passes the buck:

1. Judges defer to attorneys or "experts."
2. Experts say, "We don't make legal decisions."
3. Law enforcement says, "Take it to family court."
4. DHS says, "This is a custody issue."
5. Then family court says, "Well, DHS and law enforcement didn't intervene, so there must not be a danger."

And around and around it goes.

Meanwhile, families go bankrupt trying to afford the cottage industry that profits off this chaos. In addition to attorneys, protective parents are often in court ordered into services of other affiliates, who have a conflict of interest to keep the family court conflict going in order to profit: Guardians ad Litem at \$300/hour. Forensic evaluators—often untrained in domestic violence—charging tens of thousands. Reunification therapist at \$300 an hour, and reunification camps costing up to \$15,000 a week. Parenting coordinators

making \$300 to “stay neutral”. And finally, professional “parenting supervisors” at \$75/hour.

I’ve seen it firsthand. Children who bravely disclose abuse are disbelieved. Protective parents are labeled “alienators” for not encouraging a relationship between the child and the abuser. The science behind “parental alienation” theory has been resoundingly discredited by the American Psychological Association and World Health Organization. Other states have passed Kayden’s Law, Kyra’s Law, and recently Piqui’s Law in California to ban the parental alienation pipeline . But Oregon family courts continue to use it to strip children from safe parents and hand them to abusers.

And because there is no public oversight—no system of checks and balances—these abuses happen in secrecy. I’ve watched a close friend lose her children after one of them disclosed sexual abuse. Instead of protection, they got court-ordered reunification therapy and she was stripped of all parenting time in a closed door ex parte hearing she was unaware of. She now sees her children only under supervision and is forced to pay for it.

So I ask you: if every professional in the system says they aren’t responsible for protecting children, then who is?

The answer must be you. Legislators are the last line of defense. Oregon needs meaningful family court reform now:

1. Mandate domestic violence training for all custody professionals
2. Ban reunification camps and for-profit “alienation” experts
3. Ensure child disclosures of abuse are taken seriously
4. Fund legal assistance for protective parents representing themselves

We are failing our children—and enriching the very system doing the harm. It’s time to change that.

Thank you,

Sara Ogle