

SB365

Testimony

Good afternoon.

My name is Mercedes Fouts and I am supporting this bill due to my personal experience with the failures it illustrates.

Though the court systems in Maryland may have the best of intentions for protecting the children that are directly affected by its decisions, too many fall through the cracks and are subjected to sometimes horrific consequences that are entirely preventable.

It has been shown that continuous education in the fields in which someone works improves that person's performance and helps to prevent errors and mistakes that are often paid by the innocent children they are ultimately responsible in protecting.

In my case, a Child Access Evaluator was assigned to determine the access that my child's father would have.

In my case, there are accusations of years of severe domestic violence and abuse against myself and my child. Documentation was submitted as evidence showing secret police reports that had been filed as a record just in case something happened. There was documentation submitted that showed proof that my child's father had searched for and downloaded underage pornography. This documentation consisted of computer logs that were created by an external company's key logger program that I could not have manufactured. The Child Access Evaluator acknowledged the receipt of these documents in her write-up of her recommendations.

Mental health and therapy records were provided by my child's therapists showing that my child was diagnosed with PTSD from the abuse he had witnessed and experienced. A letter from the treating forensic psychologist stated that it was his professional recommendation that the child not be forced to spend time with his father as the child had shown fear reactions when the subject of seeing his father was discussed in session. The letter also describes physical abuse that the child experienced and told in detail to the doctor, stating that it was the doctor's belief that the father was both emotionally and physically abusive.

After the evaluation, and with consideration of all the information provided to her, she recommended initial supervised visitation with eventual unsupervised visitation.

It is my belief based on my experiences with the courts and with this Child Access Evaluator that additional education and training would have been invaluable to her as she fulfilled her obligation to protect my child.

Not everyone has the same experiences in life and therefore cannot be expected to know everything. However when one is in the position where one's actions can and will directly affect the safety and lives of innocent children, it is imperative that they should be required to seek further education and knowledge to ensure that they have the best chance to not fail in their charge to protect the innocent.

