



PROTECTING CHILDREN, PROVIDING SUPPORT, PROMOTING CHANGE

February 17, 2022

HB0561/SB0017: Child Custody - Cases Involving Child Abuse or Domestic Violence - Training for Judges

Honorable Chairman Clippinger, Vice Chair Moon, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

Anthony, Austin, Athena Castillo and Prince McLeod are the beautiful, young faces I see each day when I come through the door of our Silver Spring office. I still remember the desperate pleas of their mothers, Dr. Amy Castillo and Hera McLeod, begging the judges to protect their young children from fathers whose threats and past acts were known. As we all know, the judges did not recognize or comprehend the clear threats of lethal intent by the children's fathers in the evidence and testimony before them.

It is said that judges are already being trained. Really? I shudder, remembering a magistrate recommending full sole physical and legal custody to a convicted sex offender; many children taken from their mothers who as a consequence have become suicidal with in-patient hospitalizations after self-harm; a family suffering years of custody and access litigation despite the father being a convicted and registered sex offender; and the lack of judicial knowledge to recognize how abusers use coercive control as a tool to get whatever the abuser wants, strategically reversing victim and perpetrator for tactical advantage. These are just a few examples of the horrific consequences that families suffer because of Maryland's inadequate training of judges.

We see judges delegate their judicial authority to child custody or psychological evaluators who wrongly "diagnose" formal thought disorder, histrionic personality

disorder, encapsulated delusion, or opine about the mother's unconscious or subconscious influence on the child, or who suggest there is a "positive feedback loop": the evaluator thinks it makes the mother "happy" when the child talks about sexual abuse by the father.

I have heard judges say to parents "I'm telling you both what I tell every set of parents: you must put your hatred for each other aside and work together for the best interests of your child/children!" This advice (which may be unspoken and therefore an expectation) is well-intentioned, but completely wrong-headed, creating a false equivalency in cases of child abuse and domestic violence. This implicit bias is utterly at odds with children's undisputed need for safety, dignity, and selfhood in a nurturing family.

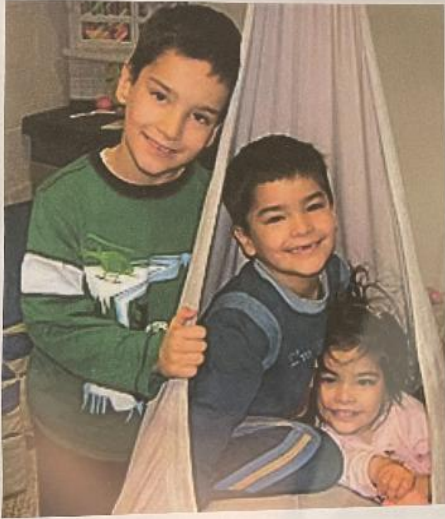
Finally, HB-561 and SB0017 should be seen in the context of the bi-partisan effort on Trauma-Informed Care in Maryland: why would Judges hearing Family Law Cases involving child abuse and domestic violence resist deepening their understanding of abuse and trauma by accredited experts in the fields? Maryland is moving towards trauma-informed care in all our public agencies, as are many other states. Why not judges?

The Anniversary of the drownings of Anthony, Austin and Athena is on March 28, 2022 and October 21st for Prince. Please think of them and honor their lives by reporting HB0561 favorably out of the House Judiciary Committee.

Respectfully submitted,
Eileen King, Founder/ED
Child Justice, Inc. 8720 Georgia Ave.
Suite 703, Silver Spring MD 20910
301-283-1762
eileen.king@aol.com

In Memory of Anthony, Austin and Athena Castillo

March 29, 2008



My name is Prince. On July 1st 2013, I would have been 2 years old...had I lived. There are many people who love me who should feel nothing but happiness on this day. Instead, they will mourn the life I could have had...if the system had been able to protect me.
Please don't forget about me.

