

Dear House Judiciary Committee,

We are writing to describe our horrific experience with Child Protective Services (CPS). I am a nurse midwife and my ex-husband is a psychotherapist who has worked with children for years. We are very conscientious parents who take pride in educating ourselves in healthy child development. In my dedication to giving our children the best lives they possibly could have, I induced lactation through a medical protocol so that our children could have the physical and mental health benefits of breastfeeding. So it shocked us when the fire marshal who was doing the home inspection to certify our house for our second adoption reported us to CPS for me breastfeeding our legally adopted one year old daughter. In addition, she reported us for having our daughter sleep on a mattress on the floor. This was something we did to ensure that if our daughter rolled off the mattress she would not get hurt. We too sleep on a mattress on the floor and didn't think this was an issue. We follow attachment parenting which eschews the use of cribs and encourages children to sleep on the mattress in close proximity to their parents when they are young. When the fire marshal came back a second time, she realized that she had erroneously assumed that our daughter was a foster child despite the fact that we had told her otherwise. Once she found out that our daughter was legally adopted, she said we were able to keep our daughter's mattress on the floor. However, she had already made the CPS call and she did not bother to call CPS back to update them with this very important piece of information. Six weeks later, CPS showed up at our door and told us that we had been reported for breastfeeding a foster child and having a foster child sleep on a mattress on the floor. The horrible thing is we told the case worker that our daughter was legally adopted. We offered to show her our adoption papers but she did not care. She insisted that we commit to ceasing breastfeeding and that we must buy a bed frame for the mattress. She also insisted that our daughter sleep in a separate bedroom which violates our parental right to follow our value of attachment parenting which allowed our daughter to be close to us if she desired. When my ex-husband attempted to negotiate with the case worker, she threatened to take our child away and raised her voice and told us that she understands parenting better than us. We were shaking with fear that a total stranger was unwilling to even discuss or understand our parental choices that came from years of research and intentionality. We were further horrified that threats of removing our child would come from such benign behaviors on our end by any person's standard. Why would a CPS caseworker consider breastfeeding a danger for a legally adopted child? Why would the same person become obsessed with us having a bed frame? How does it harm a child to sleep on a mattress on the floor especially if the parents are doing the same? Why didn't the case worker take into consideration that there were no signs of abuse or neglect in any way shape or form? She coerced us into signing a document under threat committing to buy a bed frame and omitting to cease breastfeeding. She told us that she would come back to ensure that we were safe parents. This is outrageous and disgusting behavior on CPS's part. On top of all of the above, to have the case worker raise her voice and threaten us when we were simply trying to negotiate in a calm and nonthreatening manner was unfathomable. The absolute worst part? The grievance procedure involves reporting dissatisfaction to the very case worker who has the power to remove your child from your family. Who in their right mind would initiate a grievance procedure with someone who would threaten to remove your child and raise their voice? How is anything in our testimony even remotely feasible in the United States of America in 2020? There is no checks and balances and the case worker is judge, jury and executioner all in one. It is profoundly vulnerable and scary to be threatened with having your child removed from your

home and have zero recourse. Finally, we are further horrified that CPS applied foster care standards to a legally adopted child's context. Our adoption papers state that we have the same rights as parents who's children were born to them. We now live in constant fear of CPS and feel scared to parent in the way that feels right for us. CPS should be an organization that protects children from real abuse and real neglect; CPS should not be an entity that gets to arbitrarily and decide what is and is not healthy parental values. We beseech you to clarify that parents have the right to raise their children in the ways that they see fit as long as it does not involve abuse and neglect. We are both mandated reporters and in both of our fields calling CPS is strongly encouraged for even the smallest suspicions of abuse and neglect. Every time we pick up that phone we are in deep pain knowing that CPS might go beyond their bounds of addressing abuse and neglect and erode the legitimate rights of parents to parent in the ways that they see fit.

Sincerely,

Sarit and Aaron Schneider

Aaron Schneider <aaronshneider613@gmail.com>