

My name is Hera McLeod. I am writing in support of Senate Bill 355 (Family Law – Custody Evaluators – Qualifications and Training). A little over a year ago, I gave my verbal testimony to the working group on Child Custody Reform. I testified to details of my Family Court Case, which sadly resulted in the murder of my 15-month-old son Prince.

I am writing in strong support of this bill because one of the most devastating parts of my case occurred because when the court ordered my son's murder to obtain a psychological evaluation (because the custody evaluator wasn't licensed to conduct one), they allowed my son's father to choose his own psychologist. Instead of choosing someone who was licensed to evaluate adults, he chose someone who only had a license in school psychology and was therefore NOT licensed to evaluate adults outside of a school setting.

The court never pulled her license to verify that she was qualified to give a custody opinion based on her evaluation, and as a result the judge lifted supervised visitation. On the second supervised visit with his father, my toddler (Prince McLeod) was brutally suffocated. His father had taken over half a million dollars in life insurance out of him prior to the murder – something a qualified evaluator would likely have expressed concern over given previous behavior.

If the custody evaluator in our case had been licensed to give an opinion on psychological functioning, the court wouldn't have needed to outsource – which ultimately opened the door for the corruption that occurred. While the therapist who testified in my son's case was later reprimanded by the Virginia Board of Psychology for practicing outside of her license (and placed on probation), that sanction came too late for my son.

My case is often cited as an extreme outlier, but in the last decade that I have spent advocating for Family Court Reform and Children's Rights, I can assure you that many of the horrors that occurred in my case are shockingly common. And while not every case ends up in the Washington Post, there are many children we don't hear about in the news that suffer life changing abuse. I am hopeful that you will consider my son and the children who come after him and pass this child protecting legislation.

Sincerely,

Hera A. McLeod