

January 24, 2022

Senator William C. Smith, Jr.
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SB0041 – Family Law – Child Custody and Visitation

Chairman Smith,

My name is Annie Kenny, and I am a single mother to three daughters from St. Mary's County. Several years ago, I discovered that my now ex-husband was abusing our oldest daughter. He was indicted on felony child sex abuse charges and is now a Tier III Registered Sex Offender for life. It took seven months in criminal court for my children's father to be convicted. It took four years in family court for me to get a no contact order in place, protecting my children from him. I'm sure this committee is tired of hearing from me, but there are countless protective parents out there, still in the depths of family court, afraid or unable to speak, counting on me to keep showing up.

Supervised visitation was granted for my ex-husband, to be conducted on weekends at his mother's house, supervised by her. A year into the visitation, after months of behavioral concerns with one of my daughters, she made disclosures to several members of her mental health team, all of which immediately filed a report with Child Protective Services. Child Protective Services and the police questioned my children, and ultimately came to the conclusion that it was completely a civil issue, as no laws had been broken, and my girls were not disclosing any sexual abuse at the time.

I chose to stop sending my children for their "supervised" visitation, and braced myself against numerous contempt charges and hearings. In my first contempt hearing, the magistrate refused to even discuss my ex's conviction, or his sexual abuse of my oldest daughter. He instead directed me to continue sending my children for their weekend visits at Grandma's house, with a stipulation that their father be told to leave the property at night and he not be allowed to sleep there while the children were present. Again, I couldn't bring myself to send my daughters. My non-compliance escalated my ex-husband's anger. I spent months required to be in daily contact with him, discussing all aspects of our children with him. He followed us, stalked our home, bought electronic devices for my children and harassed them constantly through them. The magistrate at one point even directed me to include my ex-husband in my daughter's mental health therapy. I was granted an unrestricted conceal carry gun permit by the Maryland State Police at the same time that I was meeting my ex-husband for supervised dinners weekly, and celebrating birthdays together at Chuck E Cheese.

Once I determined that the supervised visitation under his mother's watch was not actually supervised, and therefore unsafe, I tried numerous other routes in order to appease the court system. I tried in-house supervised visitation through Center for Children, but they stopped having a supervisor on staff. I supervised multiple visits MYSELF. He eventually hired an organization called Promise Resource Center that allowed for supervised visitations out in the community. We would meet at Burger King every Friday after work. He violated his contract with Promise Resource Center numerous times, following me to my car after visits, attempting to get the children to walk to his car with him, encouraging one of them to find him on social media and change her device password, using the information he gained at the visits to follow us, and ultimately even touching my children in ways not prohibited by his contract.

Promise Resource was under zero obligation to contact CPS, because his behavior didn't qualify as criminal. They were under zero obligation to give me details, because I was not their client, my ex-husband was. And they were under zero obligation to report to the courts, because we did not have a court order specifying this type of supervised visitation. Trying to maintain a relationship between my children and their father at any cost, exposed them to years of additional trauma. Not being within my own legal right to decide to STOP the relative supervised visitation when I discovered my daughters were not being protected cost me six months of court battles and over \$15,000. And let's not forget that my ex-husband has now admitted to still molesting children, the same age as my daughters, while I still had an active court order telling me to give him access to them.

We need to move away from the concept that an abusive parent is still entitled to a relationship with a child, and that the child should be forced into a relationship with an abuser. All that should matter is keeping the child safe. As always, thank you for your time, I appreciate the opportunity.

Annie Kenny

6632 Antelope Court

Waldorf, MD 20603