

and family court reform is long overdue in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania along with removing the statutes of limitation (SOL) in child sexual abuse cases.

Here are the reasons why:

- 1) All children deserve respect and protection. They are our future.
- 2) *High Conflict* (abuse) custody cases are a red alert problem. High conflict is not the majority of custody cases, and family court judges, hearing officers, child protection services, court appointed evaluators, ad litem, and lawyers in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania are not equipped to handle high conflict (abuse) custody matters in a way that puts the child's safety and well being first. *High* conflict abuse cases must be addressed separately from routine cases otherwise it's like a bandaid on an infected shark bite after cramming dirt into the wound.

(A public welfare social worker's function is to identify resources for troubled families and aid and assist. The average child protection service caseworker is required to have a degree. Though a social work major isn't required, it's recommended. In addition to requiring a degree in "something", some states also require social workers to pass an exam, such as the Association of Social Work Board's master's exam. These basic requirements and training does not equip a social worker for high conflict custody matters, yet experienced domestic violence counselors are not permitted to give testimony. In the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania a judge or hearing officer relies on CYS to make a determination in high conflict custody matters and this is highly problematic.)

- 3) Most parents who divorce eventually settle on something that works for the children even if they don't like each other much and it's not perfect. But in cases of "high conflict and abuse" there is a method of operation (MO) that differs. a) There has been abuse in the relationship. b) The abuser believes the other parent (usually the mother) has no rights because of abuser's disillusionment concerning the relationship. c) The abuser will continue the abuse/control after the break up if at all possible. d) The principle characteristic in this MO is the use of custody to control, intimidate, and hurt the other parent.

Without the variable of "*children*" in common the victim of abuse is able to cut ties with the abuser.

Statistically this makes up 20% of custody matters in the U.S. High conflict involving abuse is **unique**, but these cases are handled like the other 80%. This is dangerous and 20% is a big number that can't be ignored. Since family court generally is not equipped to deal with abuse the scale tips in favor of the abuser because the protective parent often keeps the child away from the abuser - thus violating a custody order and is now a criminal. It's the only way it adds up in court under the current system.

More alarmingly, if there are reports of **sexually** abuse of the children the abusive parent wins custody 85% of the time according to a study by Neustein and Leshner. The Leadership Council estimates that 58,500 minor children are placed at risk yearly because the court ordered them into the unsupervised care of an abusive parent. The reason being is that there's an unspoken theory that a vindictive parent (women) makes false allegations. Research says otherwise. A study supported by the Federal Justice Department in 2012 (the Saunderson's Study) states that only 1.3% of women make false claims that their child has been sexually abused by the father. Other research statistics vary, but are consistently very low.

- 4) \$\$\$: The sad reality of high conflict custody cases is the scale of justice is tipped by the cash flow. In a marriage/relationship where there is abuse and control, the victim coming away from that situation usually has to start over - leaving home, property, and resources behind. The abuser demands it. The common thought amongst domestic abuse survivors is that those things are a small price to pay for freedom. But it gives the abuser new control because the abuser has the resources. A protective mother in a high conflict (abuse) custody case typically has no attorney, or has one provided by the county because she doesn't have the financial means to do otherwise in the aftermath of the break up.

It's a money trail that works for everyone except the victim.

5) This means that a child's plea for help goes unanswered, the non offending parent/child's first line of defense is punished for protecting her child/children, and abuse victims, in general, are conditioned not to tell because the consequences of telling are great. The status quo of 50/50 custody in Pennsylvania can add up to a sentence of prolonged abuse for the child victim in high conflict cases.

6) **The Safe Child Act** will ensure that judges and the family court's primary focus is ensuring that children are safe from abuse and trauma. It ensures that an expert determines the scope of the problem (not under qualified and callous court appointed agencies or child protection services). It ensures that protective parents are able to protect their abused and traumatized children without **legal backlash**.

7) \$\$\$: When a child is not protected there's a high cost:

The broad scope of child abuse is a wave of people stepping into the grown up lane as broken adults.

(Statistically this is 20%. It's likely more because 20% are the cases that end up in court.)

Case in point: Male child was sexually abused repeatedly in the late 1970s & 1980s by mother's boyfriend (Childhood Trauma). This man is now 40+ years old, has never held a job longer than a few months, has addictions, has long seasons of depressions, and other disorders. He is abusive. His primary livelihood has been public assistance and low income housing. He has five children from three (dysfunctional) mothers and each one of those children have experienced childhood trauma. Two of those children are young adults and experiencing adult dysfunction.

The common denominator is that he/she/they were not valued and protected as children.

- Tax dollars are spent on the wrong end of the problem.
- The reach and control of family court in high conflict custody cases in Pennsylvania is enabling and promoting early childhood trauma.
- The reach and control of the family in Pennsylvania court is enabling abuse and abusers.
- The reach and control of the family court in Pennsylvania is victimizing victims.
- **It does not work.**

By focusing on protecting the children in *high conflict abuse* cases, and taking advantage of independent evaluators, therapists, and counselors that in most cases are covered through the parent/child insurance plans and/or other programs, it would resolve many things:

- It lessens the financial and time burdened need of court appointed agencies.
- It would send a higher percentage of well adjusted, independent, career minded, young adults into the world, academics, and work force.
- It would lessen the pain and trauma of at least 20% of children.
- It will help break the cycle of abuse.

Contact Peggy at savinggrace1dayatime@gmail.com (Pennsylvania Chapter of the Stop The Abuse Campaign) if you'd like more information or to help.. We support and endorse Congressmen/women who support this worthy cause. If you'd like more information about the Safe Child Act and how this can go into effect in Pennsylvania, (*for Congressmen/women*) contact Melanie Blow at melaniehdblow@gmail.com Melanie is a NY resident directly involved in the efforts of the removal of the Statutes of Limitations (SOL) in child sexual abuse cases in NY. She is the COO of the Stop The Abuse Campaign which is a nationally focused organization pushing for family court reform and the Safe Child Act in every state. She and others would like to see this campaign to stand strong in Pennsylvania and endorse congressman/woman who promote this worthy cause.

Please don't support child abuse by looking the other way