

From: Brian Burgess
Sent: Monday, March 16, 2015 1:28 PM
To: Ann Pugh
Cc: Julie Tucker; Maxine Grad; Jo Perreault
Subject: Joint Hearing regarding S-9

Dear Representative Pugh,

Thank you for responding and please accept my apologies if my email was a bit headstrong, I clearly have much to learn and relearn about the process and will endeavor to look a bit more closely before I leap.

We believe strongly that S.9 Section 17 Joint Legislative Child Oversight Protection Oversight Committee should include language specifically mentioning the Vermont Family Court and members of the Judiciary (broadly speaking). The following includes suggested language (**bold** and in CAPS) we believe will increase the overall safety of children throughout Vermont by facilitating a higher level of accountability among those responsible.

c) Powers and duties.

(1) The Committee shall:

(A) Exercise oversight over Vermont's system for protecting children from abuse and neglect, including:

(i) evaluating whether the branches **INCLUDING THE FAMILY COURT**, departments, agencies, and persons **TO INCLUDE SITTING MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY COURT JUDICIARY** that are responsible for protecting children from abuse and neglect are effective;

(ii) determining if there are deficiencies in the system and the causes of those deficiencies **TO INCLUDE ANALYSIS OF JUDICIAL RATIONALE FOR JUDGMENTS/DECISIONS IN WHICH EXPERT TESTIMONY AND/OR EVIDENCE OF CONTINUED OR NEW THREATS TO A CHILD'S SAFETY ARE DISMISSED**;

(iii) evaluating which programs are the most cost-effective;

(iv) determining whether there is variation in policies, procedures, practices, and outcomes between different areas of the State **INCLUDING JUDICIAL INTERPRETATION OF STATE STATUTES AND/OR PRECEDENT**, and the causes and results of any such variation; and

Our rationale for including the bold and capitalized items above, is to increase accountability among a specific branch of government and to address pervasive concerns that while DCF needs to perform their duties better, the family court has also failed in too many cases to help keep children safe.

If need be, and only by your invitation, we are prepared to support our recommendations with specific evidence in which members of the Family Court have ignored expert testimony concerning the impact of prolonged

exposure to abuse on child development as well as explicit and evidence based recommendations by DCF relating to the safety and well being of numerous children throughout central Vermont. I assure you, this evidence will not be anecdotal, but actual data and reports by those directly involved.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to share our concerns. Please let me know if you have any questions or if there is anything else myself and/or my colleagues can do to help.

Sincerely,
Brian Burgess, MS, CCC-SLP
Speech-Language Pathologist
Co-chair, Washington County Child/Youth Advocacy Group