

Mom #1
La Crosse County 54644

September 26, 2020

RE: La Crosse County Child Custody Assessment Team Process Complaint

Dear La Crosse County Board of Supervisors and all copied on this communication,

My apologies for the length of this letter regarding the La Crosse County Custody Assessment Team processes through the La Crosse County Family Court. We have all received our advanced degrees and positions by proving that we are able to handle a miserable level of detail at the expert level. It behooves us to, on behalf of all, lean into the uncomfortable and complex truth, rather than simple and base fallacies that are all too common. Please thoughtfully examine the massive quantities of evidence available that La Crosse County is not properly serving women, mothers, and children.

A near-perfect storm of substandard La Crosse County Child Custody practices, policies, and procedures have led to children, mothers, and women not being listened to in the face of a father or man claiming that he is the party who has been wronged (this is the Family Court concept of “alienation,” which is not an accepted psychological practice aimed at trauma survivors anywhere outside of family courts). In my particular family, La Crosse County dissolved sole custody and primary placement of children in favor of offering a majority of each to a man and father who has sexually assaulted multiple adult women (signed accounts and witnesses available), possesses childish My Little Pony Porn (screenshots available), had incomplete investigations of child abuse or neglect in four counties (Multnomah County of Oregon, La Crosse and Jackson County of Wisconsin, and Winona County of Minnesota - per mandated reporters’ concerns), frequent job-loss due to social and professional isolation and conflicts, and has lost consciousness to the point of hospital admittance while on parenting duty.

Multnomah County, Oregon explicitly granted me, REDACTED, sole custody, majority placement, and explicit permission to return to La Crosse County, due to myself, the mother of two minors, our son and our daughter Weyl, being the primary caregiver their entire lives, the availability of a higher paid career-field job in La Crosse, and an extensive family network in Wisconsin (including a licensed elementary special education teacher as free, back-up childcare as needed) (06/1/15 Trial Memo and Stipulated Judgement available), whereas my ex-husband had not participated in childcare to that point, was attempting to recover from chronic job losses, had been protesting special education services for son our son, and had no consistent, close family support anywhere. In order to avoid an expensive and hurtful trial, the presiding Oregon

judge called attorneys into chambers to inform us how she would rule if we did not stipulate (as described above). As a result, I, REDACTED, agreed to let the State of Oregon multiply my hourly, Adjunct Professor wage, not by credit-hours, but by 40hours/week, setting Child Support based not on our actual incomes (when employed, for my ex-husband), but giving my ex-husband a travel allowance until he moved to Wisconsin, and pretending that I made almost \$78 thousand dollars per year.

After both parents had established residency either in Wisconsin (myself and the two children) or Minnesota (my ex-husband chose to live farther away, in Winona, across the river, after a year of using the travel allowance reduction in child support), I filed a motion in La Crosse County to recalculate child support. my ex-husband responded by alleging that I, my family, the Melrose-Mindoro School District, and Onalaska Pediatric Dentistry were harming the children via allowing an Individual Educational Plan for our son for educationally diagnosed Autism Spectrum Disorder (our son was then five years old, and had been educationally diagnosed since he was two and three/quarters years old, also receiving Special Education services in Multnomah County Oregon, reconfirmed by Melrose-Mindoro), by the dentist providing services more slowly than my ex-husband desired (based on age and sensory sensitivities of a child with ASD), and claiming that our daughter (then two and a half years old) was routinely being given free access to alcohol, via the evidence that our daughter would see any liquid and say “tiny sip,” as she had to my ex-husband when he had been holding an alcoholic beverage. Assigned Guardian Ad Litem, Ellen Frantz, found that there was no evidence of harm being done to either child in the ways alleged by my ex-husband.

After my ex-husband was found to be in contempt of Family Court Commissioner Elizabeth Wright’s order that he provide evidence of a job search, my ex-husband invoked The Uniform Interstate Family Support Act against using the Wisconsin Child Support formula, as the UIFSA requires the parent seeking a modification to hire an attorney in the state of the parent declining modification (I would need to seek an attorney and modification in Minnesota). After attending ordered County Mediation, requested by my ex-husband (wherein my ex-husband quit when he could not convince me into a room without our attorneys present, and, in response to my concerns about his alcohol consumptions, abuse or neglect, and hope to convince me to agree to 50-50 custody without any evidence of personal improvement, the County Mediator scoffed at me and said, “It would really be better if you two could just talk to each other,” as though I hadn’t spent years trying to work thoughtfully with my ex-husband before leaving him permanently), I simply could not afford to hire a Minnesota attorney to seek increased child support.

After yelling at me, multiple times, in front of witnesses, in front of the children (witnesses’ statements available), and after forcing the Melrose-Mindoro Elementary School to call Jackson

County Sherrifs to their building as my ex-husband tried to enter the building to collect our son early on our son's birthday without any custody or pick-up permissions, my ex-husband motioned for a full Custody Assessment Team process in La Crosse County, which was ordered. This was ordered in the spring of 2018, after the children's Gundersen Pediatrician, Cassandra Grube, had referred them, based on their emotionally reactive behaviors at an appointment, to be seen by a pediatric trauma specialist. Gundersen had recently granted my ex-husband, with zero custody, full access to the children's Gundersen healthcare management system, MyCare, which would allow him to appear at appointments unannounced, tell the children their providers were "wrong" and "not smart" (as had already happened with teachers), and change appointments and prescriptions. So I MyCare messaged Dr. Cassandra Grube, asking her not to make the appointment within the Gundersen system, as this would immediately disregard our legal right to confidentiality of reporting concerns and open us up to retribution from my ex-husband. Dr. Grube recommended that the children see Nicole Milliren (M.S. LPC) at Peace of Mind Counseling for evaluation. Per viewing a dated screen-shot of my ex-husband's childish My Little Pony Porn and per meeting our daughter to witness her emotional reactivity, disorganized attachment patterns, and our daughter asking adults to look at her bare bottom as she pulled down her tights, Nicole Milliren recommended that our daughter Weyl work with Maureen Neuville (LPC), and informed me that she would be reporting her concerns to La Crosse County. When forced by Ms. Neuville to confirm or deny my belief that my ex-husband might be abusing the children, based on the advice of Dr. Grube and Nicole Milliren, I said yes and she recorded my answer as though I had volunteered my adamant belief. Our daughter proceeded to make two spontaneous disclosures, about inappropriate touching with my ex-husband, to Ms. Neuville, without me in the room, and which I was shocked and appalled to hear about from Ms. Neuville. Ms. Neuville alerted me that she would report to La Crosse County in addition to Ms. Milliren.

I asked my attorney if I should report my concerns and contemporaneous notes to La Crosse County, or if doing so would be interfering with an ongoing investigation. Advised that asking questions of La Crosse County was not interference, I called to ask what was happening after the three mandated reports of abuse suspected by my ex-husband against our daughter. La Crosse County Police Department informed me that they had no ability to investigate something that was happening in Winona MN, and reported that they had sent the reports to Winona County Police Department. Ann Scharmach of Winona Police Department said that they had not received any concerns from La Crosse County. I asked Ms. Milliren and Ms. Neuville to please report to Winona County, rather than La Crosse. Upon receiving a copy of at least one of the concerns, Ann Scharmach of Winona PD, asked me what I'd like to do about it. I asked her advice. She advised me that mothers themselves should not report concerns, as "moms are just crazy sometimes," and that she thought the time was ripe to conduct a "forensic interview" in Winona. In the forensic interview with strangers, who were not familiar with the titles that my ex-husband commands for the children to call us and certain body parts, our son only replied "I

don't know," to almost all questions and our daughter said almost literally nothing. And this concluded the two counties' investigations of my ex-husband. No county has ever paid an unexpected visit to the house of my ex-husband when he has opened the door to answer questions or give a statement, including Multnomah County Oregon (where the mandated reporter was a Pediatrician worried about bruises on our son's face and red marks on his neck), including when the Federal Bureau of Investigations out of Rochester informed La Crosse County Human Services and Winona Police Department that they were the parties responsible for knocking on the door of my ex-husband (the FBI's only role was to parse jurisdiction; the FBI could not force an unexpected visit, investigation, or warrant for entry).

The La Crosse Custody Assessment Team - consisting of Guardian Ad Litem Ellen Frantz, County Mediator Dawn Bender (LCSW), and Child Development Expert Kimberly Erickson-Nichols (LCSW) - were informed of all ongoing investigations, professional providers of myself and the children, details within an assigned "autobiography" given to them, and no fewer than six signed statements revealing aggressive behavior, controlling and intimidating actions, and sexual assaults by my ex-husband. Given access to all ongoing processes, the La Crosse County Custody Assessment Team consistently and almost exclusively chose to absorb and carry forth the exact narrative and vocabulary of my ex-husband, in the face of many other qualified individuals, including more experienced and licensed professionals who knew the family better than they. The La Crosse County Custody Assessment Team whole-heartedly applied double standards in their exploration of "he said; she said."

Without conducting any scaled evaluations, the La Crosse County CAT disbelieved years of Licensed Elementary Special Education teachers, Licensed Elementary School Teachers, Pediatricians, Speech and Language Pathologists, Occupational Therapists, and Dr. Paula Bank (MD and PsyD) who had all educationally and medically diagnosed, confirmed, and supported our son with High Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder, using our son's Melrose-Mindoro Three-year Reevaluation for Services data and scales and meeting our son herself, with full family medical histories presented to Dr. Banks.

The La Crosse County Custody Assessment Team disregarded the two spontaneous disclosures by our daughter to Maureen Neville, the multiple mandated reports in multiple states and counties, the concerns of Pediatrician Grube, and school phone calls to local law enforcement, in favor of my ex-husband's argument that every single educational, medical, and psychological practitioner besides themselves had been "coached" by a mother asking questions out of fear and coordination of communication, even though I had never, ever reported my ex-husband myself, leaving it to professionals to decide what was concerning and what was not. I had only asked the questions that any concerned parent would.

This La Crosse County Custody Assessment Team read about my ex-husband's sexual assaults, rapes, control, and intimidation in my team-requested "autobiography," my published writings that were either utterly anonymous or always without my ex-husband's name, the signed accounts of witnesses and other adult survivors, and then stated that none of these met the statutory requirements for "abuse," especially because none of us had reported them at the time they occurred, due to the aggression, intimidation, and control by my ex-husband. When I, in person, told the La Crosse County Custody Assessment Team about the times when, for example, my ex-husband installed a digital thermostat app on his phone so that he could prevent me from turning our shared home temperature below 75* F even when he was absent, forbid me from visiting my family even when they had major surgery, forbid me from using "his" spoons among the household cuttlery, would not allow me money for groceries for myself and the children, held me by the hair and punched me in the vagina, and forced anal sex on me after I had said no (and then he apologized), by asking me, "But did he ever rape you?"

After having been hurt, controlled, and intimidated by my ex-husband in these ways for years, I did make a mistake. When, after repeatedly being hung up on by my ex-husband, yelled at by my ex-husband, and having our daughter alone withheld from me by my ex-husband, I asked the Winona Police Department for assistance on a day when my ex-husband would not disclose how or if he was planning on delivering the children to school on a school day. The Winona Police Officer remained in his car, so did not hear my ex-husband threaten to not let our daughter come with me when I ducked out of my ex-husband's personal space in his foyer a first time, nor when my ex-husband continued to grumble at me as I buckled our daughter into my car, nor to continue to insult me in front of the children as my ex-husband buckled our son into my car, nor to hear my ex-husband standing between me and the driver's door and ordering me to leave, also in front of the children. Not wanting the children to hear anymore, I leaned in to close the car door, and, deeply afraid of being within my ex-husband's personal space, ducked for a second time. In this moment I did not see the car door, or who gave it an extra push or not, while my ex-husband glared at me and my thumb was caught in the car door with a significant injury. The kids also associated the door closing on my thumb with my ex-husband glaring and insulting me by that car door, and asked me if I would be ok from him "slamming you on the car." I did not "coach" their questions, and minimized my injury to them immediately, saying that I would be "fine" as I bled on the drive to their school, after the officer on the scene yelled at me and not at my ex-husband, so that I could not even tell him of my injury.

When I ducked out of his personal space, which has long term been physically and emotionally dangerous to me, I did not see that I may have been the only one closing the door that shut on my thumb. The La Crosse County Custody Assessment Team, had access to this Winona Police Department Dash Camera video for the entire length of their initial assessment, knew of my desperate wish to see the video, and yet they forced me to tell and even draw the incident over

and over again, to see if I would change my story, which I did not, because of course I had been ducking away from a man who had terrorized me for years as he continued to insult me in front of our children. This is not modern, trauma-informed practice by the CAT. This is a complete lack of recognition of trauma survival by the exact professionals who are supposed to be able to determine who is being hurt on behalf of any county.

Following in my ex-husband's statements to others that I am "crazy" or "nuts," my ex-husband asserted that I struggle with mental health far more than himself to the La Crosse County Custody Assessment Team. In violation of Wisconsin Guardian Ad Litem Guidelines, the La Crosse County Custody Assessment Team ordered both parents to psychological evaluation, despite Wisconsin Guardian Ad Litem Guidelines that potential abusers and survivors not be evaluated in this way for the explicit reason that survivors show up on psychological evaluations due to the abusers, while the abusers do not score as troubled by their own abuse. Worse, the La Crosse County Custody Assessment Team asked the no-longer neutral PsyD, Rebecca Angle, to simply "confirm" a diagnosis of Borderline Personality Disorder for me, with *zero collateral materials* given to Dr. Angle, and no formal, scaled evals conducted by the CAT. This means that Dr. Rebecca Angle had no documentation that my mild OCD and anxiety that have been professionally managed for over twenty years, when she took "impulsivity" and "magical thinking" to mean Borderline Personality Disorder, rather than the twenty years of professionally confirmed management of anxiety and OCD, or as PTSD from domestic abuse.

The La Crosse Custody Assessment Team overturned the information from The State of Oregon, years of Licensed Special Education Teachers, Licensed Elementary Teachers, Pediatricians, Primary Health Physicians, multiple other PsyDs, and more familiar, experienced, and familiar counselors to remove children from an experienced child care administrator, certified nursing assistant, professional elementary school programming coordinator, advocate of adults with developmental disabilities, university professor, and mother with more than thirty letters of reference, in order to give majority placement and custody to the father suspected of abuse of adults and children. They cancelled therapy services for our son and our daughter, including even just on the topic of processing a high-conflict divorce.

Additionally, they forced this transition in the middle of the school year, with emergency orders based on my ex-husband's concerns that I read "Llama Llama," "Dora The Explorer," and "The Berenstain Bears" trying new schools to the children to help them prepare for this major transition. They signed to Family Court Commissioner Wright that I was diagnosed, not with Borderline Personality Disorder, but with Bipolar Depression, which only shares a first letter with the disorder they ask to have "confirmed" with no collateral materials or professional scales. They stated in this signed document that if I had made Dialectical Behavioral Therapy

“progress” by the following summer, I would be returned to sharing a full 50-50 custody and placement of our son and our daughter.

Six months later, when offered Certified Dialectical Behavioral Therapist, Lisa Hammes’ (MS LPC) repeated verbal and written confirmation that I had both completed expensive, long-waitlist DBT training (in addition to studying attachment parenting with Nicole Milliren), I do NOT qualify for a Borderline Personality Disorder or Bipolar Disorder diagnosis, and have made much personal progress on not reacting to my ex-husband’s behaviors with the more apt Post Traumatic Stress Disorder diagnosis, the La Crosse County Custody Assessment Team and Family Court Commissioner Elizabeth Wright did not allow me 50-50 custody and placement of my children. Again, against all advice of all other professionals involved, almost all of them more qualified and experienced with higher career field degrees, licensure, and history with my family.

Further, when the original La Crosse County Custody Assessment Team decision and the subsequent lack of no return to 50-50 custody was appealed via the “De Novo” process with La Crosse Circuit Court Judge Scott Horne, the La Crosse County Custody Assessment Team continued to fully use the narrative and vocabulary of my ex-husband, in the face of the same evidence that existed and had been ignored in the first report, and then in the face of the new, more qualified and experienced professionals whose new verbally and written record disagreed with the La Crosse County Custody Assessment Team about abuse, trauma, mental health, medical and educational diagnosis, and statutory requirements. The La Crosse County Custody Assessment Team scoffed at the order of Winona Police Chief Bostrak that my ex-husband be investigated by a Sergeant not at the original scene of the car door injury (who tried at least one dozen times to collect a statement from my ex-husband, who refused), the new educational information that our son (with ex-husband-cancelled Special Education support; no further IEP services in Winona [along with La Crescent known for declining WI IEPs]) was a full year behind in previously-supported reading and writing progress, our daughter remained (according to PsyD Goodnature) emotionally reactive, all extra-curricular activities (swim, dance, scouting) cancelled for the now socially isolated children (well before covid-19 became a pandemic), and that I continued to study both my own mental health and attachment parenting strategies with multiple professionals more qualified, experienced, and familiar.

In fact, because I asked my ex-husband to explore our son receiving in-school support for reading and writing, and schedule the court-ordered full developmental evaluation before hiring a private, unlicensed tutor outside of school, the La Crosse County Custody Assessment Team recommended that I no longer have shared educational decision-making. This has resulted in our son retaining his medical High Functioning Autism Spectrum diagnosis, plus subsequent diagnoses of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and specific and several language-based

learning disorders (Gundersen - sometimes called “dyslexia” and “dysgraphia,” etc.), all while experiencing a two-year gap in school support, solely as the result of my ex-husband being handed the ability to control educational and medical decisions. I begged the La Crosse County Custody Assessment Team not to institute this specific and general reduction in services and activities that would result from handing my ex-husband this power. But my son remains unsupported by a school IEP to this day.

The La Crosse County Custody Assessment Team held me at fault for anonymously and *never using the name of my ex-husband* writing about about abuse, LGBT identities, trauma survival, and gendered bias, using what is required of a writer to obtain tenure-track employment as evidence that I “struggle with boundaries.” The La Crosse County Custody Assessment Team read aloud on the stand, to Judge Scott Horne and the audience, a private note to my Primary Care Physician about my own vaginal health, again trying to say that my writing about my sexual health to a well-known professional in her area of expertise was a sign that I have no boundaries, that I am a person “with a hole in the middle, like a donut.” (PsyD Rebecca Angle in court) In an interpretation directly opposite of correct reading comprehension, the La Crosse County Custody Assessment Team took a sample of my *anonymous* writing (given to them by my ex-husband) about quickly resolving the LGBT “coming out” process with my family in 2000 as permission to assert that all of my trauma was incurred, not at the hands of my ex-husband as corroborated, but when my family had an uncomfortable first year before reconciling my LGBT identity.

This is nowhere near modern practice that is informed by trauma survival, LGBT identities, correct study of psychology, child protection, cycles of abuse, and encouragement to women, mothers, and children to begin speaking up as soon as they recognize that something is wrong. We spoke up, earnestly, and were punished. Control, intimidation, and aggression were not recognized by the La Crosse County Custody Assessment Team, Family Court Commissioner Wright, nor Circuit Court Judge Scott Horne, who also fell asleep on his bench during proceedings. The moment that the La Crosse County Custody Assessment Team belittled my stories of abuse and trauma, the moment that FCC Wright accepted the CAT’s circular logic and serious typos, the moment that Judge Scott Horne stated that he “must give priority to the County-hired team,” my children and I were sunk. Nobody representing La Crosse County even cares that my ex-husband stopped paying child support without a modification, knowingly violating court orders for years. He hasn’t paid a cent of arrears since, while making \$145k/year as a computer programmer (when he manages to keep a job), while I am behind in my academic career field due to providing solo childcare for the children for three years so that he could be a professional.

Judge Scott Horne even said, on the record, that this was all due to “alienation” by me towards my abuser. “Alienation” is not a valid psychological concept allowed anywhere but in Family Courts (not civil or criminal). Federal data and coverage has demonstrated that this leads women who even reluctantly warn official entities of their and their children’s treatment at the hands of their ex-husbands to lose custody, regardless of the truthfulness of their accounts and worries. Forcing reunification with abusive men or entire reversals in custody and placement rewards abusers, fathers, and men for telling their victims and survivors to remain silent, *or else*. my ex-husband always told me that nobody would believe me, that I would be in trouble for reporting, and that it was all in my head. La Crosse County is the first official body, and the only that has mattered for the last several years, that has purchased these assertions by my ex-husband. In the negation of The State of Oregon findings, the concerns of La Crosse County mandated reporters, and numerous medical and psychological practitioners, La Crosse County has taken the practice within our beautiful county backwards decades. This includes that the mistaken county professionals are allowed to bill petitioners for their unreasonable defense of themselves and the abusers.

More closely examining gender bias that prefers men’s and fathers’ claims to victimhood over traumatized women and children who only speak negatively in the face of abuse and serious concerns is being examined on a national level, and La Crosse County would do well to operate with modern practice, policy, and procedures, rather than in centuries-old ideation that mothers alone carry the burden of any challenge or hardship faced by children, especially just because the abusive ex-husband says so. The pendulum of gender has not yet swung to favor women in courtrooms, and it is a mistake to then “correct” course further in favor of men and fathers. Abuse survivors speaking out about their treatment at the hands of abusers should not be considered to be “alienating” to the men and fathers who committed such offenses in corroborated ways. La Crosse County is currently enacting antiquated and incorrect gender views, psychological practices, and penalizing women and children who dare to speak up and ask questions about mistreatment at the hands of smart, wealthy, charming men and fathers whose feelings are hurt by the descriptions of their own actions. Please help us.

Sincerely,

Mom #1

<http://www.momsandkidssurvivingabuse.org/>