

5 Ways Washington Family Courts Hates Mothers But first, A Pop Quiz



Sign Below to Protect Our Kids



What do Arkansas, Tennessee, Alabama, and Oklahoma have in Common?

Answer: ~~These states are less progressive than Washington.~~ These states are safer for women to live in. Washington state scores in the top ten for domestic violence, ahead of Arkansas, Tennessee, Alabama, and Oklahoma.

1. Inadequate Training for Guardian ad Litem (GALs): Guardian ad Litem often lack essential training, leading to harmful decisions. According to the American Bar Association, in *Breaking Bias: Scandal in a Lay Guardian Ad Litem Office*, "Washington State's system has had many problems, including long-lasting cases, routine separation of siblings, and the lack of legal representation for children."

2. Unjust Custody Loss for Mothers: Many mothers unjustly lose custody of their children due to misconceptions about PTSD stemming from abuse. *Crazy Women and Hysterical Mothers: The Gendered Use of Mental-Health Labels in Custody Disputes* states, "that mental-health labels serve to discredit the mother, attack her parenting abilities, and distract from her allegations of violence by the father." (Zaccour)

3. High Costs of Supervised Visitation: Supervised visitation imposes financial burdens on mothers, from \$50-100/hr to visit their own children when it is acknowledged that "The absence of clear judicial rules in the area of custody has contributed to an increase in conflict [...] supervised access can... be used by parents who seek to gain an advantage and to exercise dominion over the other parent." (Brandt, p.203) In other words, weaponizing access to a protective parents own children, using the system in a continuation of abuse.

4. Alarming Suicide Rates Among Mothers: The rising suicide rates among mothers involved in family court cases indicate a growing national tragedy. Catherine Kessenoff, a former U.S. Attorney spent over a million dollars trying to see her children over three years in family court, writing in her suicide note: "I cannot survive this torment and the grief that comes from such a prolonged separation from my children." The author asks: "... what has energized family court to degrade and demoralize women to such an extent that all social progress is obliterated by the barbarism of such courts, which use heavy-handed tactics of extortion, blackmail, and threats in lieu of due process?" (Neustein)

5. Gag Orders on Mothers: Imposing gag orders on mothers limits their ability to advocate for their children's safety. "Gag orders are effectively silencing mothers fighting for justice," an advocate from the Domestic Violence Services Network, Inc. observes. Far from uncommon, this has become an accessory to the profit over protection model in Family Courts where one mother in a child custody case couldn't even say why she was being kept behind bars... without an attorney.

'Most people said, "What is your crime? Why are you here?" I couldn't answer them...The gag order was so restrictive she was found in contempt for discussing the length of her sentence, how she wanted in-home detention and even that she needed a new attorney. The judge sentenced her to 23 months in jail. (Boyd)

Act now to protect our Children in Washington State Family Courts

Signed,
Concerned Citizens of The Family Court Crisis

This Family Court Educational Series was formed from a community-led coalition of organizations, survivors, and professionals. This series aims to address the Family Court Crisis in Washington. The current system not only fails to protect mothers and children but perpetuates abuse and neglect.

[Domestic Violence in WA Family Court Series Archive](#)

[Series I. The Issue.](#)

[Series II. Who Gains Financially?](#)

[Series III. Mothers Homeless by Family Courts](#)

[Series IV. Fox Guarding the Henhouse](#)

References

[Breaking Bias: Scandal in a Lay Guardian Ad Litem Office.](#) Available at: americanbar.org

Suzanne Zaccour, "Crazy Women and Hysterical Mothers: The Gendered Use of Mental-Health Labels in Custody Disputes" (2018) 31:1 Can J Fam L 57.

Brandt, E. (2007). [Concerns at the margins of supervised access to children.](#) In Faculty Works. University of Idaho College of Law. From Digital Commons @ Uldaho Law: <https://www.uidaho.edu/law/digitalcommons>

Neustein, A. (2023, June 4). [Family court drives mothers to suicide: Former Brooklyn federal prosecutor is latest victim.](#) Women's eNews.

Boyd, S. (2023, January 13). [Colorado lawmaker takes action after a mom jailed for violating "unconstitutional" gag order.](#) CBS Colorado.

