

**The Fox Guarding the Henhouse:
A Crisis of Justice in Washington's Family Courts**



In Washington State, the family court system's intersection with domestic violence cases presents a landscape marred by systemic failures. It's crucial to understand that these issues are not reserved for the unlucky few. The stark reality is that *any* parent can find themselves caught in the web of a broken system, where the stakes are nothing less than their children's futures and their rights as parents.

The challenges within the family court can impact anyone, regardless of their socio-economic status, for richer, or for poorer. The frightening possibility that any parent could wake up one day no longer recognized as a parent, at the mercy of flawed judicial decision, and at the hands of an abuser, is reality. Without exceptional financial resources upwards of \$300,000+ in disposable income, parents may face insurmountable odds in fighting for their children's custody and safety, and for the truth to be exposed. In the words of Dr. Bandi Lee, Family Court is:

"... a place where the greatest level of unmitigated violence happens among all the courts. It also happens to be the court where there's [the] greatest profit to be gained. Most courts do not make money, and yet family courts have a multi-billion dollar profit rate every year for exactly doing the wrong thing. So so I think the violence that happens in family courts is closely tied to the violence that is done through basically adjudicating injustice at the expense of women and children." (Buzzsprout, 2023).

Recent cases across the country, including Washington State and Montana, illustrate this point vividly. In Montana, a case where the state Supreme Court had to remove a Lake County District Court judge from a child custody case underscores the arbitrary nature of judicial decisions. This situation mirrors the unjust outcomes seen in Washington's family courts, where a judge's bad day can drastically alter a family's life (Daily Montanan, 2024). Washington State Family Judges have immunity from [un]knowingly or [un]willingly destroying children and their abused parent, and that needs to cease.

The systemic issues in family courts extend beyond mere legal shortcomings; they represent a crisis where children are effectively kidnapped and victims are left to survive at the whims of their abusers. This system, originally designed as a protective measure, is too often turned into a weapon against the very individuals it should safeguard.

The mental health impact on parents and children caught in these legal battles is profound. As Dr. Bandy Lee points out, the stress and trauma inflicted by unjust court proceedings and separation from children can lead to severe psychological damage (Ms. Magazine, 2023). This impact is not confined to the courtroom but echoes throughout the lives of all family members involved.

Non-profit organizations like WSCADV, among many others while aiming to assist DV survivors, often find themselves navigating a treacherous judicial landscape where their efforts can be undermined by the very system they are trying to help survivors navigate. Legislative actions, while well-intentioned, frequently fall short in actual practice, leaving survivors and their children vulnerable and outright targeted even worse.

The situation in Washington's family courts demand immediate reform. Systemic changes are needed to ensure accountability, and the ethical practice of law. The stakes are too high, and the consequences too severe, for this crisis to continue.

The crisis in Washington's family courts is not an abstract dilemma but a real and present danger to families across the state. It is a reminder that the cost of failure is measured in the lives and well-being of parents and children. The time for action is now.

Who are the Foxes in Washington State?

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](#)

References

1. Buzzsprout. (2023). "Confronting the Family Court Crisis with Dr. Bandy Lee."
2. Lee, B. X. (2023). "Experts Say Catherine Kassenoff's Family Court Case Should Alarm America." Ms. Magazine. from Ms. Magazine
3. Daily Montanan. (2024). "Montana Supreme Court Removes Lake County District Court Judge from Child Custody Case." from Daily Montanan

