

March 26, 2013

Testimony for the House Judiciary Committee in support of HB 2014, related to child abduction

By Julia Diane Firestone

Oregon State Capitol, Salem, Oregon

For the record, my name is Julia Diane Firestone. I am here today to testify in support of House Bill 2014 and I am very grateful for the State Representative Alissa Keny-Guyers leadership on this urgent issue.

Chair Barker, Vice Chairs Garrett and Kreiger, and Members of the Committee. Thank You for giving me this opportunity to come forward and testify regarding the Parental Alienation of my three children, Juliane DawnMarie Firestone, Jonathon Emil Firestone and AnnaLee Lavon Firestone.

I married James M. Firestone in 1992. We have three children, Juliane (now 18), Jonathon (now 13), and AnnaLee (now 11). I divorced in 2006 because of domestic violence. In 2008 my son said to me, "Mom, I don't feel the boundaries within me anymore." That was the beginning of his breakdown.

The pressure to prove loyalty to their father was too great and both my older children (then 10 and 14) suffered mental and emotional breaks. They began to physically and emotionally abuse their younger sister (then age 8) and me, and I had to restrain my son on a daily basis. My son kicked, punched, and whipped me with phone cords or tried to beat me with the phone. <sup>He tried to stab me with</sup> The knives he got from his father. While on the phone with their father, the children would yell at me and call me names. My oldest daughter used the knives and safety pins she got from her father for cutting. She started running away, huffing and smoking pot and cigarettes she got from her father. She also acted out a violent relationship with a serial rapist. The respite provider reported to CPS that my son said these attacks were planned events created by the father, his girlfriend, and the children. They were to create as much chaos in the home as an unstable environment in order to live with dad.

During the course of alienation, my children were saturated with statements from the father and girlfriend, Amy Alger, such as, "I am homeless because your mother kicked me out. It is your mother's fault we are divorced. I am cross dressing because your mother rapes me every day and I want to look good while she does it. I dress this way so I don't kill her." They had a "dress up party" for my son. Although his girlfriend was married to someone in prison, they staged a wedding and told the children she was their new mother and I was not. They

introduced the girlfriend at the children's schools and official meetings as their mother. The children also referred to me as that woman or a four letter word.

We had been in family counseling for some time when the counselors asked for CPS involvement in hopes they would provide a safety-net in order to get the father and girlfriend on board with the children's therapy. The case worker, Kristi Mersino, said the father was obviously ill and needed help. If I plead guilty to something then she would make sure our family received the help we needed. She also promised the father would not see the children until he proved to be stable by a therapist. I plead guilty to not being able to provide a safe and stable environment due to circumstances beyond my control. Unfortunately CPS did not follow through with any promises.

After comprehensive psych evals ordered by the state, Dr. Morrell determined the family to be suffering from the worst case of Parental Alienation he had ever seen and gave very specific recommendations and said the father was not a resource for the children and he should not see them until he proved to be stable. He diagnosed the father with Narcissistic Personality Disorder, maybe two. He also said there was much more to this case if anyone was willing to look further. A few weeks after the case worker read these reports to me she denied the diagnosis of Parental Alienation. After showing her the reports she said "We are in Oregon not Washington. I do not have to follow the recommendations," and continued to overnights with the father.

Against the advice of 7 therapists, 2 Drs., the city's police department, foster parents, CPS continued to allow contact with the father and the children's behavior intensified. 9 times I was promised residential for the two older children to get them away from their father, it never happened. After a year in foster care the children's behavior continued and became more destructive. It became very clear that our family was not going to get the help we were promised and I allowed my oldest daughter to live with dad. After all there would be no difference between dad's house and foster care. My son was to stay in foster care with outpatient treatment, in exchange for custody of my youngest daughter who was still living in my home. During team meetings most times the therapists and CPS would become exasperated with the father's behavior, calling it abusive. CPS and therapists would walk out and tell us to quite fighting, and I have to get along with him. Funny, I am not the therapists, they could not get along with him, yet I was expected too.

My son was, and still is, verbally and physically abusive to myself, his sister and animals. All therapist's voiced great concern that the father's behavior's and attitudes towards me and therapist undermined our son's therapy. After reporting to CPS stark changes in our son after visits with dad, they repeatedly asked CPS to stop the visits to no avail. They also asked for

increased services but their cries for help fell on deaf ears. They could not risk their own family and dropped my 10 year old son to shelter where he remained for several months.

I tried every avenue I could think of and asked for help from Representative Hicks but they could do little to help. At the closing of our case the therapist, in their report, voiced concerns of "the father and son planning to further alienate the mother." CPS placed our son with the father because he is a safety threat to his younger sister. Also, this is where they get the least amount of calls. He lacks social skills and is home schooled. The father is able to provide a safe environment. They also said he understood the special needs of our son and the abusive relationship between the children. I retained full custody. At a recent custody hearing the father exhibited his mental illness. When I asked the case worker if the father could understand our sons exceptional mental and physical needs the case worker replied "Not at this time." I then asked if he could understand the dynamics between the children. She replied "Not at this time." Our case is closed now but I will never forget the words from the case worker, "This is Oregon, not Washington. I don't have to follow the recommendations." She also told the judge "These parents have fought so much that they have caused irreparable damage to these kids." The judge agreed. She had continued contact and support to the father after the case was closed. Nor will I forget the words of the judge. After hearing testimony from the psychologists and witnessing the father's behavior he said he was very proud of me. He was proud because I had come so far with my attitude. I am going into my son's home and cleaning his dirty linens that are soiled with animal feces and cleaning mold out of the dishes and pots and pans so my son could eat. But he never addressed the father on why the house was this way. He gave custody to the father. Today I called and asked if our son could go with me for professional pictures. He said he did not want Jonathon's Pictures taken with me. If I want to talk to our now 18 year old daughter, I have to leave messages with the father. Don't dismiss this behavior by saying she is an adult now. She lives in the same town and I hear from her once every three months.

Our legal system and CPS call it a custody issue. However, those of us who have to watch our children's lives become distinct call it what it is; Parental Alienation. It is the greatest form of child abuse in the US and its effects lasts for generation. Children don't see a parent for years or a lifetime. They are missing half their lives. They never know their brother and sisters. They deserve both parents but are denied the love and affection of one. Parents and children become depressed and exasperated and give up. Some commit suicide.

Therapists all over the world recognize this abuse and have come to specific treatment. It is much like Stockholm Syndrome; the hostages, (the children) empathize with their abductors, (other significant influences). Our legal system, mental health professionals, and Child Protective Services need to be educated and given direction on the psychological effects

of Parental Alienation. Parents are dismissed, treatments are undermined and children are forever broken. There are six foster parents, 7 therapists and 2 psychologists and the city police department who want to know where the justice is for my family. They would like to know when you are going to investigate the CPS branch of Southern Oregon for poor handling of this case and aiding in the abuse caused by Parental Alienation.

It is time for children to be vindicated and families to be put back together. My youngest daughter described Parental Alienation in its clearest form. She said she misses her sister all the time. It is like mourning the living and it never ends.