

Dear Committee on DHS and Safety,

My name is D.J. and I'm 14 years old. I want to tell you what it was like for me and my little brother when we tried to speak up.

We told people we didn't feel safe at our dad's house. We told counselors, teachers, and other adults. But instead of being listened to, we were told it was just "divorce problems." It wasn't. We were scared.

When the court said we couldn't see our mom for 90 days, it ended up being more than 200 days. It was one of the hardest times of my life. Instead of helping me, my "new" therapist tried to tell me lies, and I was threatened that if I didn't repeat those lies, I wouldn't be allowed to see my siblings or my mom and step-dad .

I missed the birth of my baby brother. I missed the funerals of my grandpa and grandma. I wasn't allowed to see my friends or the people who made me feel safe. Every day I wondered why nobody believed me, and I tried to figure out how I would find my mom and stepdad once I turned 18. I will never trust an adult again. I don't know why the people who were supposed to protect kids thought it was easier to say I was confused and pretend my abuse never happened.

I want adults to understand: kids don't make this stuff up. When we say we're scared, or we say something bad happened, we need you to listen — not call it conflict. I needed safety, and instead I felt punished for speaking the truth.

I hope you can make changes so other kids don't have to go through what I did. DHS needs reform, and so do the people who work for the courts — including the lawyers who are supposed to represent kids. I never want another attorney, and I will never talk to another therapist again.

Sincerely,

D.J.