

**Subject:** Testimony in Support of a Statewide Family Court Reform Task Force  
Inclusive of DHS/CPS

Dear Chair Gelser Blouin and Members of the Senate Committee and Human Services,

My name is Hilary Gold, and I am a member of the Oregon State Bar as well as a mother navigating a prolonged custody case. I urge the Legislature to create a Statewide Family Court Reform Task Force to address systemic failures in Oregon's family courts, including their intersection with DHS/Child Welfare (CPS).

### **My Experience**

I have seen firsthand how family court and DHS systems can trap protective parents—especially those who are also mandatory reporters—leaving them unable to fulfill their legal and ethical duty to report and protect their children.

For well over two years, my case has remained unresolved in family court, and unfortunately this is not unique. When parents who are also mandatory reporters have safety concerns during the pendency of a custody case, under normal circumstances, they would be obligated to report to DHS/CPS. Yet parents are frequently warned not to do so, because during custody litigation such reports can be portrayed as manipulative—harming their case and punishing them for trying to protect their children while fulfilling their legal duty.

As both a parent and a mandatory reporter, this forces them into an impossible choice:

- If they report, they risk being discredited in court or accused of attempting to influence the outcome.
- If they stay silent, they risk violating their duty to report and leaving their child(ren) unprotected.

Either choice compromises their child(ren)'s safety and their ability to fulfill their role as a parent and legal professional.

### **Systemic Failures**

Unfortunately, these experiences are not unique. There are broader failures at the intersection of family court and DHS:

- **Under-resourced DHS investigations:** Reports are often labeled “unfounded,” not because no harm occurred, but because investigators lack resources or access to full case history.
- **“Three strikes” chilling effect:** Parents are cautioned that after three reports come back “unfounded,” future concerns may be disregarded, even when valid and ongoing.

- **Judicial reliance on DHS findings:** Courts frequently defer to DHS conclusions, even when investigations are incomplete, resulting in unsafe custody or parenting time orders.
- **Punishment for raising concerns during litigation:** Protective parents risk retaliation in the courts for advocating safety, which either silences a parent, or punishes those who speak up
- **Mandatory reporter conflict:** Parents who are also mandatory reporters face a dangerous dilemma: fulfill their legal duty to report and risk punishment in court, or remain silent and leave a child unprotected.

## **Path Forward**

Family courts cannot be reformed in isolation. To ensure reforms are meaningful, a Family Court Reform Task Force must include DHS/CPS and it should:

- Evaluate how DHS investigations are used—or misused—in custody litigation.
- Protect mandatory reporters who are also parents in family court cases.
- Safeguard parents from retaliation when raising legitimate safety concerns.
- Improve communication and data sharing between courts and DHS

## **Conclusion**

No child's safety should depend on whether a parent remains silent out of fear. No parent should ever be forced to choose between protecting their child and protecting their legal standing in court.

Oregon now has the opportunity to lead. I urge the Legislature to form a Statewide Family Court Reform Task Force that includes DHS/CPS in its scope and ensures no parent or child faces these impossible choices.

Thank you for your time and commitment to Oregon's families.

Respectfully,  
Hilary Gold  
OSB# 120247