

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

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Danika Halverson, and I am a mother of two children that experienced horrific abuse in a custody case in Washington County. Both of my children are now adults and will speak to these experiences. I also worked in the juvenile dependency legal system as an investigator for over 10 years in Oregon, Arizona, California and Montana. I come to you with over 20 years of personal and professional experience in these exact systems that are failing children. 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

In my own case, I experienced firsthand how CPS workers will take a report from a mother and minimize all allegations if there is a divorce proceeding. My personal experience in calling CPS to report my son's reports of his father brutally hitting him, his fear of his father (this will finally be believed and confirmed 7 years later- which he is still healing from his PTSD due to the abuse by his father) and this report being minimized by CPS- and used against me in family law court (which I was punished for). In my profession as an investigator, I observed countless CPS Supervisors minimize a mother's report of father's abuse and state, "she's just angry at him and trying to get him back." This lack of concern and denial of allegations was like a cancer in the CPS system I experienced and ultimately was one of the reasons I couldn't work in that environment.

I filed for full custody after attempting to amicably share custody. I never asked for child support or alimony. I just wanted out of the abusive marriage and was not believed by the domestic violence resource center- because I had "no visible bruises." I didn't want to believe the father of my children would abuse our boys, but once he couldn't get to me he started in our oldest child. My oldest son would report, "daddy won't stop hitting me," and throw himself to the ground kicking and crying. He would scream he didn't want to return the day of exchange. My youngest son starting pooping his pants at school the days he was with his father. Any "normal" mother would feel the need to protect their children and call CPS. Instead, I was repeatedly warned not to report, because during custody litigation it could be portrayed as manipulation that would harm my case and punish me for protecting my child and fulfilling my legal duty.

As both a mother and a mandatory reporter, this forces me into an impossible choice:

- If I report, I risk being discredited in court or accused of attempting to influence the outcome.
- If I stay silent, I risk violating my duty to report and leaving my child unprotected.

Either choice compromises my child's safety and my ability to fulfill my role as a parent and legal professional.

Systemic Failures

Unfortunately, what I have experienced is not unique. My case reflects 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

My sons have had to undergo major treatment as adults from the failures of the system. My oldest reported the abuse to his school counselor, his teacher, the CPS investigator, the custody evaluator and other adults. And no one believed him because this small town had all talked to each other and minimized it because his father was charming and characterized as a “good father.”

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 what I have experienced as both a mother involved in custody litigation and as a mandatory reporter.

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

Respectfully,
Danika Halverson
Kosola v. Kosola