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EDITORIAL

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Infants are being penalized

We were deeply saddened, though not surprised, when reading the Feb. 1 Metro article “Custody fight imperils breastfeeding by mom.” This story is all too familiar to those who study the family court system.

For the past four decades, we have researched how U.S. domestic-relations courts, built on the ingrained adversarial system of justice, have cruelly and senselessly torn infants and children from their mothers. Let’s examine the background of cases that come before the domestic courts that pose questions about custody of a nursing infant. To begin with, mothers of newborns are immersed in the 24/7 demands of motherhood, as infants are known to barely sleep through the night. A mother is therefore not likely to leave her partner unless there is domestic violence, cheating or severe mental abuse. However, if she should decide to divorce and seek custody of her infant, she will be savagely attacked by the other side for “weaponizing” breastfeeding against the father to gain an advantage in a custody dispute. Does this attack on mothers make any sense? Yet courts are telling Mother Nature to take a back seat to champion the “rights” of a father to deprive his child of both the biological and psychological benefits of breastfeeding naturally given to babies since the beginning of time — and in so doing place the infant at risk.

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It is not just spouse vs. spouse in a custody suit. Since when did the “best interest of the child” not outrank the convenience of a parent in such an action? All relevant authorities agree that breast milk is the best nutritional foundation for a child if it is available.

Other than penalizing the baby, what options were available for this judge? Allowing the father to schedule visitation in the baby’s home? Allowing for adjustment of schedules as the baby matures as frequent breastfeeding does not last forever. At 6 months or so, solids will likely be added to the diet, followed soon by “sippy cup” ability.

This judge does not seem to have considered counseling this father to engage in some patience as he adjusts to the baby’s changing needs instead of turning the baby’s life upside down to accommodate his need for convenience or control. Of course, the judge would not consider that it is the mother who has done all the “heavy lifting” here, accommodating her life to establish a reliable demand-supply source of nutrition for this child. That would rob the father of “equal status” before the court. This court demonstrated shortsightedness and plain ignorance in failing this child.

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