

**CALL FOR A DOJ INVESTIGATION**

I was deeply moved by Amy Neustein's opinion piece, "Mothers Who Report Abuse Still Losing Custody 'at Staggering Rates,'" (Sept. 1). I know the problem all too well, as co-author of one of the first books on this subject (Rosen, L. and Etlin, M., "The Hostage Child: Sex Abuse Allegations in Custody Disputes," Indiana University Press, 1995) and my personal sequel in progress ("The Recap: My 40 Years in the Mothers' Movement").

But I was moved for another reason, as well. All too often the media have avoided any fair reporting or discussion of this issue because of the prejudices and prejudgments that shroud the truth. The Washington Jewish Week must be commended for enabling discussion of such an important topic, as the consequences to mothers and children separated by punitive and irrational court orders can no longer be ignored.

I'm so glad Neustein's op-ed brought out the issue of supervised visitation for non-abusive mothers because that has occupied one of the major themes of my research. What I've seen is that supervision imposed on a mother who has reported her child's disclosure of child sex abuse has the ill-fated effect of rupturing and ultimately extinguishing the mother-child bond.

Originally supervised visitation was designed to actually protect a child from a parent who had a history of having beaten them. When it is used, instead, to "monitor" what the child says to the mother – in the wake of the child having disclosed abuse (even when confirmed by mental health professionals, health care providers and/or mandated reporters) – the message given to the child is that they are paying a dear price for having spoken up and sought help in the first place.

The loss of a mother under those circumstances is catastrophic to the developing child's psyche. The child experiences an avalanche of negative emotions: desperation, deprivation, grief, terror, as well as anger toward the mother for "deserting" them.

With years of enduring weekly supervised visitation the child often comes to see its mother as the guilty party because SHE needs supervision by authorities at an institutional setting. A lifetime of bitterness and resentment can result.

This crisis cries out for the full force of the Department of Justice to investigate the various agencies involved and the financial incentives built into the system as courts supply these relatively unregulated agencies

with clients, sadly and reprehensibly at the expense of the wellbeing of mothers and children, and the destruction of countless family relationships.

Kudos to WJW for beginning this vital discussion.

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