

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
January 24, 2011

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Teen Videos Show Human Toll of Scathing CA Audit Report *Thursday's Report Slams Family Courts for Unqualified, Untrained Professionals*

SACRAMENTO – Compelling video and written testimony from California teenagers about uncaring family court professionals ruining their lives and forcing them into contact with abusive parents shows the tragic human impacts of an [official report](#) released Thursday by the California Bureau of State Audits.

“These video clips show the tragic impacts of a broken family court system, said Kathleen Russell, Executive Director for the Marin County-based Center for Judicial Excellence. “The American people will be stunned that this is going on. These untrained court staff and appointees yield tremendous power over the physical and sexual safety of children of divorcing parents, and their mistakes result in thousands of kids being held hostage and kept away from loving family members,” she said. The teen videos detail family court problems in California counties that were not audited, as well as one of the two counties that was.

The long awaited California state audit report slams the Marin and Sacramento Family Courts for failing to ensure that the court professionals who routinely make recommendations that determine the outcomes of contested custody disputes possess the minimum qualifications and training to perform their duties. The report also criticized the courts’ handling of litigant complaints, potential conflicts of interest and payments to minor’s counsel, among other issues.

The audit was stalled for eight months until the courts were threatened with subpoenas because they refused to grant access to the records and personnel needed to conduct the audit. It was later discovered that the Marin Family Court shredded important mediator working files for more than two weeks during the standoff with the State Auditor, and the state’s Administrative Office of the Courts admitted to granting prior permission to the Marin Court to destroy family court documents during the audit. The California audit is the first government review of a family court system in many years, and its results have national relevance since the family court crisis extends far beyond California’s borders.

[The Leadership Council on Child Abuse & Interpersonal Violence](#) estimates that 58,000 children per year in America are being court-ordered into full custody or unsupervised visits with parents that the children claim are physically and sexually abusing them. The California report indicates that numerous mediators working in the audited counties lacked proof that they had completed even the basic required training in domestic violence.

The report validates ongoing complaints that have been filed for years by attorneys, litigants, child advocates and domestic violence groups that the family court culture is marked by a severe lack of accountability and even lawlessness. These claims have been repeatedly raised – and routinely ignored by courts nationwide-- for more than a decade. Courts have routinely dismissed legitimate reports of due process violations as the handiwork of “a few disgruntled litigants.”

“These are things we have been talking about for years, and we've been ignored,” says Connie Valentine of the California Protective Parents Association.

Contact Scott Alonso at 415-747-4199 or scott@kathleenrussell.com for access to the teens’ sensitive testimony & videos. Visit <http://www.bsa.ca.gov/> to download the audit report; and www.centerforjudicialexcellence.org, <http://ca3cacaca.blogspot.com/>, and <http://www.protectiveparents.com/cases.html> for more information on the national family court crisis that is placing thousands of kids in harm’s way.