

Major overhaul needed

Since reading the letter "Reform divorce" in the Nov. 7 Mirror, I had the opportunity to read House Bill 13. While I agree that the family court system definitely needs a major overhaul, House Bill 13 did not remotely begin to address the issues.

In the present destructive custody system, children of divorce are at the mercy and discretion of judges and custody masters who seem to determine the placement of the children by the mood that they are in that day. Unlike other judicial proceedings, in many instances facts and evidence don't seem to enter into the equation in custody.

The custody system is biased against innocent children and without just cause reduces one parent to the role of visitor and in many cases to no contact at all. National statistics indicate that in 93 percent of custody cases, it is overwhelmingly the father who is affected.

By placing children in these lopsided custody arrangements, the judges willfully promote a market for the mental health industry and create a \$600 million windfall for Pennsylvania's government coffers. How? Through the federally-subsidized Temporary Assistance for Needy Families funds.

When children are ripped away from one parent and entire families, the custodial parent may begin a vicious cycle of false allegations of abuse and parental alienation against the noncustodial parent, thereby stimulating the child's emotional regression and behavioral outbursts. Then comes the seemingly endless line of professional resources to deal with the family problems that the court created. Psychologists, psychiatrists, guardians, social workers and Children and Youth Services all set out to prove that the visiting parent has caused the child's emotional regression. Instead of finding that the judge's discretion was wrong, the

blame is most always placed on the visiting parent.

These resources further limit the contact with the child's visiting parent, causing more damage by recommending that the children and visiting parent be placed in the county-sponsored supervised visitation program for one hour per week, if they're lucky.

If we want real changes we need accountability for professionals who damage children and judges' power needs to be limited in family matters. We also need to encourage our legislators to reintroduce the proposed Presumptive Joint Custody legislation that such as was provided in House Bill 1723 or Senate Bill 175. These bills were killed in committees through testimony from special interest groups, such as the National Organization for Women, family-law attorneys and the psychiatric profession, at the expense of children's lives.

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