

May 10, 2004

YOUR VIEWS

Reform required

After reading the article, "Child welfare system under fire" in the April 16 Mirror, I felt compelled to write. As a paternal grandparent, I am witness to the unparalleled policies and procedures adhered to by Blair County judges in regard to child custody cases.

I can empathize with the people who formed and participated in what appeared to be a peaceful demonstration. I commend them on their efforts. I applaud Robert Kearns, who is asking that state legislators examine the county's child welfare system.

Not only should we implore our state representatives to examine our child welfare system, but also take into consideration the rights of grandparents. Some rarely get to see their grandchildren.

I believe that we have "fine judges" — fair — good, decent people" as the article stated. But I would like to know if any of them are grandparents? Do they get to see their grandchildren? Do they get to spend time with their grandchildren? Are they permitted to be a part of their grandchildren's lives?

How would these judges feel if they were limited in the amount of time they were permitted to see their grandchildren — limited not only by the court system but also by the parent with physical custody?

Statistics show that the paternal parent and grandparent's rights are most of the time set aside and priority is given to the maternal parent. This seems to be the consensus in our Blair County court system. Is this because some judges favor the mother in some cases? Does this county really put the needs of the child first?

Blair County is not the only county in Pennsylvania that needs reform. From there, we must look to see if Pennsylvania follows the norm for the United States in regard to its laws to provide for and protect our children and give the paternal parent and grandparents rights. An unbiased, morally and ethically sound reform must begin in Blair County first.

As attorney Donald Speice stated, "Domestic situations are emotionally charged." Anyone who has been involved in a child custody case knows exactly what he means. To the fortunate people who never have experienced the physical and physiological stress that a custody case entails, consider yourself blessed.

I beseech the judges of Blair County to take a long, hard look at each case, and when you make your final decision, know in your heart of hearts that you are making the decision that truly is best for the child.

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