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**Dominic Raab MP**

Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice  
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Dear Justice Secretary,

We are writing following the investigation published in The Observer newspaper on 12<sup>th</sup> June 2022, which explores the use of unregulated ‘parental alienation’ experts in the Family Court. There is a growing body of evidence revealing that mothers and children who have been subjected to domestic abuse are increasingly being met with counter-allegations of parental alienation and are being put at risk by the evidence provided by these experts.

The Ministry of Justice’s own ‘Harm Panel’ report published in June 2020 revealed unsafe practices, silencing and re-traumatising of victims and children, and the increasing removal of children from their primary carers, based on pseudoscientific theories of parental alienation. Parental alienation is not contained within either of the two major international classifications of diseases – the DSM-V and the World Health Organisation’s draft ICD-11. Numerous organisations nationally and internationally have denounced the credibility of parental alienation theories and have condemned their use in family court proceedings including the United Nations, the CEDAW Committee, GREVIO, the NSPCC, the American Psychological Society, the New Zealand Psychological Society, the European Association for Psychotherapy and the US National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges.

The Harm Panel report raised concerns, which are borne out by our own professional work, practices, and research, that mothers’ disclosures of domestic abuse and children’s fears of abuse and disclosures of sexual abuse are being interpreted by parental alienation experts as evidence of alienation. This has led to victims and children being afraid to even disclose abuse for fear of children being transferred to the care of an abusive parent, based on the recommendations of these experts.

The Observer investigation now reveals that some of these expert witnesses are completely unregulated and lacking in the qualifications and expertise necessary to make diagnoses in parents and children, provide valid expert opinion and make recommendations. This means that judges can make life-changing decisions for children, including changes of residence to an abusive parent and the termination of contact with a victim parent, based on unqualified and specious opinion and recommendations.

Yet almost two years on from the Harm Panel report the use of parental alienation theories and the instruction of unregulated experts continue unchecked. There are clear dangers to the public who may unwittingly hire an unregulated expert witness and thereafter have no legal redress should harm occur. As the Association of Clinical Psychologists UK said six months ago: “Psychologists without the necessary qualifications and experience are sometimes being instructed to act as expert witnesses in the family court. This can result in harm to the public.” Professor Mike Wang, Chair of the ACP-UK, told The Observer that “what is going on is one of the most scandalous things I’ve ever come across” and that the ACP “is aware of unregulated experts making findings of so-called parental alienation and doing tremendous harm. I’ve seen children taken away by the force of the state on the basis of PA.”

There is growing concern also about the lucrative parental alienation industry, with expert assessments costing up to £10,000 and therapy far more. Of particular concern is conflicts of interest whereby a parental alienation expert instructed as an assessing expert recommends costly therapy for the so-called alienating parent to be undertaken by themselves or by a linked business associate. The ‘alienating’ parent can then find themselves barred from any contact with their child until they have completed this therapy. Concern about this practice has led the Family Justice Council to issue interim guidance warning courts about the dangers of these conflicts of interest.

For all these reasons, we call on the Ministry of Justice, in partnership with the President of the Family Division, to immediately initiate and commit to an urgent Inquiry into the use of parental alienation experts in the Family Court in order to safeguard children subject to family court proceedings and to restore the safety and confidence of the public who may use the Family Court.

Yours sincerely,

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Cyrene Siriwardhana	Surviving Economic Abuse
Selma Taha	Southhall Black Sisters
Hannah King	NHS University of Manchester
Dr Elizabeth Dalgarno	SHERA Research Group
Olive Craig	Rights of Women
Ruth Davison	Refuge
Jenny Beck QC	Beck Fitzgerald
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Annie Neal	Support Not Separation
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Janet Veitch	UK Women's Budget Group
Paola Motosi	Collective for Childhood Protection Maternal Voice
Poonam Joshi	Indian Ladies UK
Sylvia Velasquez	Asylum Aid
Tracey Norton	Disabled Mothers Rights Campaign
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