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AB 2098 Testimony Assembly Judiciary Committee March 29, 2016

Rebecca Vail

Hello,

My name is Rebecca Vail and I would like to start by thanking you for allowing me to speak in regard to such an important subject.

I am a survivor of the trauma forced upon me by the corrupt Sacramento County family court system. From the time I was 12 to 16 years old, I endured a string of 12 abusive court-appointed-therapists who would verbally abuse me, grab my wrist, and try to drag me into the small room attempting to force me to reunify with a criminal. I remember my abusive biological father would trap my sisters against a wall and burn them with fireworks, he'd rip phone lines out of the walls so we couldn't call for help, he'd threaten my mom with a knife, and drunkenly punch holes in the walls of our house. Instead of protecting me, these therapists would threaten me with ultimatums, telling me that if I did not do whatever they ordered me to do, forcing me to sit in a closed small room with my abusive biological father, they would write a fictitious report and tell the judge things about me, my family life, and mother which were blatantly untrue with the malicious intent of getting the judge to change custody. They went on to tell me that with the change of custody, I would never be permitted to see my mother and sisters again.

The sole reason I endured endless psychological torture from these 12 therapists was because I was not permitted to speak for myself and describe my circumstances and wishes to the judge. Instead, some of these 12 therapists committed perjury just for financial gain, used me as a financial pawn to gain more money, not caring about my safety, my mental or physical well-being, or the fallout from their actions. To the therapists and attorneys, increased court contention equaled an increased paycheck. This is a form of human trafficking. In those four awful years, my family went into debt of \$120,000 trying to keep me safe; but, I lost my childhood, my family was in ruins, but most of all, my trust in the ethical principles of the Sacramento County family court system was violated. I felt unsafe, and insecure as to whether I had a future or not. My voice was never heard.

I want to provide the opportunity that I never had to all the children who need to have their voices heard to protect themselves. Kids are not "property" or "paychecks" but real people, and they should be listened to. These innocent children do not deserve the same agony I was forced to endure. I implore you to please pass AB 2098, and allow children 10 – 14 years of age and older to speak for themselves.

Thank you for your attention, and thank you Assemblyman Brian Maienschein for introducing this bill that has the potential to help so many others.