

For Immediate Release:  
December 5, 2016

Media Contact:  
Kathleen Russell

## **58 Children Murdered By A Parent Who Could Have Been Saved** ***Filicide in U.S. Family Courts: A Snapshot*** released by Judicial Watchdog

SAN RAFAEL- Filicide is the deliberate act of a parent killing his or her own child. For scores of parents in the United States whose children were murdered by the other parent, repeated attempts were often made to convince family court judges that their kids were at grave risk. In a data release called [\*\*Filicide in U.S. Family Courts: A Snapshot\*\*](#), the Center for Judicial Excellence presents 44 cases from across the U.S. during 2008-2016 in which family courts failed to protect 58 children who were murdered by a parent during a divorce or child custody dispute.

“If it is the last breathe I take, I will make sure that Duncan and Jack’s story is heard,” said central Illinois mother **Amy Leichtenberg**, whose two sons Duncan and Jack were murdered by their father, who then killed himself on a court-ordered unsupervised visit in 2009. “I want to make sure that no other parent ever has to feel this pain,” she said.

In a lengthy national story from [\*\*100Reporters\*\*](#) by Laurie Udesky, [\*\*Custody in Crisis: How Family Courts Nationwide Put Children in Danger\*\*](#), the role of the family court system in harming children of divorcing parents is examined, and the Center for Judicial Excellence filicide data is brought to light.

The data [\*\*snapshot\*\*](#) focuses on the deaths of 58 children in 44 cases in which a U.S. family court did the unthinkable during a couple’s separation or divorce- it *knowingly* placed their children into unsupervised contact with a dangerous parent who killed the child(ren), and often themselves. In far too many filicide cases, family court judges ignore evidence of domestic violence, untreated mental illness, and drug or alcohol addiction by a parent and instead blame or punish the “protective parent” for raising legitimate concerns about placing their children into harm’s way.

“These kids were court-ordered into contact with their murdering parent when their safer parent was typically ignored or even ridiculed by a judge as they fought for their child’s safety, said **Kathleen Russell**, the executive director of the Center for Judicial Excellence.

By law, family court judges have a duty to protect the children of parents who appear before them from abuse, neglect and murder, regardless of what a parent requests during the proceeding. Domestic violence research details the numerous challenges that battered spouses face when trying to leave an abusive relationship. This data does not attempt to explore these issues- it merely presents a snapshot of cases where family courts failed to protect children from the ultimate harm- murder by a parent. The research is ongoing and should not be viewed as the entire universe of U.S. child murder cases related to divorce and child custody. In fact, more than [\*\*520 children in the U.S. have been murdered\*\*](#) when divorce, separation, custody, visitation or child support were mentioned in news coverage.

**The Center for Judicial Excellence** has been working for more than 10 years to expose and fix a crisis in the U.S. family court system that is harming countless children whose parents are navigating separation and divorce. Visit [www.centerforjudicialexcellence.org](http://www.centerforjudicialexcellence.org) for more information, or to report a family court-related filicide.

For photos of the Leichtenberg boys and their mom Amy, go to [\*\*\*Filicide in U.S. Family Courts: A Snapshot.\*\*\*](#)

##