

Dr. Childress Legislator Presentation

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Forensic Psychology is a Failed Experiment

Forensic psychology is a failed experiment in service delivery to a vulnerable population. Forensic custody evaluations are harmful to children and their parents and fail to provide the court with the information needed by the court for its decisions.

The practice of forensic psychology in the family courts needs outside and independent review. The practice of forensic psychology needs to end and clinical psychology (treatment not custody) needs to return to court-involved practice.

However, clinical psychologists will refuse to work in the family courts because it is too professionally dangerous to their license. When forensic psychology in the family courts collapses, as it has and as it will, the family courts will be left without any competent services from professional psychology.

From the New York Blue Ribbon Commission on Forensic Custody Evaluations:<sup>1</sup>

**From NY Blue Ribbon Commission:** “Ultimately, the Commission members agree that some New York judges order forensic evaluations too frequently and often place undue reliance upon them. Judges order forensic evaluations to provide relevant information regarding the “best interest of the child(ren),” and some go far beyond an assessment of whether either party has a mental health condition that has affected their parental behavior. In their analysis, evaluators may rely on principles and methodologies of **dubious validity**. In some custody cases, because of lack of evidence or the inability of parties to pay for expensive challenges of an evaluation, **defective reports** can thus escape meaningful scrutiny and are often accepted by the court, with **potentially disastrous consequences** for the parents and children... As it currently exists, the process is fraught with bias, inequity, and a statewide lack of standards, and allows for discrimination and violations of due process.”

**From NY Blue Ribbon Commission:** “By an 11-9 margin, a majority of Commission members favor **elimination of forensic custody evaluations entirely**, arguing that these reports are biased and **harmful to children** and **lack scientific or legal value**. At worst, evaluations can be **dangerous**, particularly in situations of domestic violence or child abuse – there have been several cases of children in New York who were murdered by a parent who received custody following an evaluation. These members reached the conclusion that **the practice is beyond reform** and that no amount of training for courts, forensic evaluators and/or other court personnel will successfully fix the bias, inequity and conflict of interest issues that exist within the system.”

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<sup>1</sup> NY Blue Ribbon Commission:

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