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Dads' Resource Center Calls for Changes in Protection From Abuse Reporting System
Flaws in Pennsylvania's Reporting System for PFAs and Biases Lead to Disadvantaged Children

State College, PA—June 4, 2019 – The [Dad's Resource Center](http://www.dadsrc.org) recently surveyed Temporary Orders of Protection From Abuse (PFA) filed during 2017 in 12 Pennsylvania counties and found that how information is currently reported obstructs the development of data to track biases in PFA outcomes based on gender. The Dads' Resource Center is calling for changes to this reporting system that would allow gender biases in the PFA process that unduly impact the access of fathers to their children to be identified and addressed.

PFAs are a critical intervention that saves lives and the Dads' Resource Center (DRC) stands firmly and strongly against physical abuse and all forms of relationship abuse. Abuse can be devastating to the injured party as well as the children who see or experience it.

Unfortunately, children can also be negatively impacted by the misuse of the PFA system. Studies have shown significant benefits to children when both parents are actively involved in their lives and therefore it is important that the system functions as it was intended and is not misused, such as unfairly removing a parent from a child's life without due process.

A system that was designed to protect against abuse is itself being abused at times. According to statistics reported in the [2017 Pennsylvania Department of Human Services Child Protective Services Annual Report](#), there were 47,485 total reported cases of abuse, of which 4,836 were found to be valid. False abuse allegations, and the issuance of PFA orders by judges without actual evidence of abuse, are more common in child custody cases than might be expected and can have a devastating effect on the falsely charged person and the children involved according to the [legal advice/family law section](#) of the Free Advice website.

"It is not uncommon for the PFA system to be misused for the purpose of gaining leverage in matters of child custody," states DRC executive director Jeff Steiner. "When this misuse occurs, it is often the children who suffer the most as it affects their perception of, and limits their access to, one of their parents, usually the father."

The DRC believes it is possible to safeguard those at risk of harm while at the same time having the metrics to ensure that parental equity is maintained. This is vital to the development of children under the best of circumstances, but even more so under the difficult, often contentious, circumstances that exist in these types of situations.

"The inconsistencies from county to county in what information is currently made available, and how it is reported, hinders our ability to quantify patterns that might indicate systemic biases or barriers that may work against fathers. The potential misuse of the PFA process, and its impacts on custodial decisions, child support determinations and the access of fathers to their children, calls for changes in the current reporting system. We

need to be able to quantify patterns that may work against fathers and rob children of their involvement and isolating the real cases of abuse”

The survey involved an analysis of the county data on the dash board for the [Unified Judicial System of Pennsylvania website](#), and additional research into the available information on Temporary PFAs for each of the counties.

County	Requested Temporary PFAs	Granted	%	Denied	%
McKean	47	47	100	0	0
Fulton	14	14	100	0	0
Centre	233	230	98.7	3	1.3
Mifflin	60	59	98.3	1	1.7
Blair	442	431	97.5	11	2.5
Venango	136	132	97.1	4	2.9
Clarion	43	40	93	3	7
Jefferson	96	82	85.4	14	14.6
Fayette	557	470	85.4	87	15.6
Cambria	164	132	80.5	32	19.5
Mounter	40	32	80	8	20
Pike	155	108	69.7	47	30.3
TOTALS	1,987	1,777		210	

In 2017 there were 1,987 temporary PFAs requested in the 12 counties that were surveyed. Of that total, 1,777 (89%) were granted and 210 were denied (11%). Six of the 12 counties surveyed had over 97% of temporary PFAs approved. Pike county had the highest number of temporary PFAs denied, 47 of 155 (30.3%).

The survey uncovered a lack of uniformity in the practice of the law, the information that is made publicly available and how that information is documented, from

county to county. The DRC wants to draw attention to the real need for uniform standards in practices, reporting and documentation across all counties in the state of Pennsylvania.

The DRC is recommending:

- 1) That the Unified Judicial System of Pennsylvania develop metrics to quantify potential gender biases in the PFA process, as well as the extent that it impacts the custody of dependent children.
- 2) Along with this, in order to ensure the quality of the data collected, that uniform standards are created for the information reported and documented at the country level.
- 3) The resulting data is made available to the public.
- 4) An honest and reasoned policy discussion, including this data, is convened to ensure that the access children have to either of their parents is not unduly limited by the PFA process.

“While PFAs are often necessary interventions, the DRC wants to ensure that the system functions as it was intended and is not abused,” says Steiner. “The lack of available PFA data, variances in the practice of the law and disparity in reporting of PFA outcomes, illustrates at best a lack of awareness, and at worst a lack of concern of the impact that PFA issuance and awarding can have on the children involved.”

About Dads’ Resource Center

[The Dads’ Resource Center](#) was founded by Dr. Joel N. Myers, AccuWeather founder, chief executive officer and chairman in 2015. Its mission is to provide education, resources and advocacy for single fathers so they are able to fulfill their vital role in the well-being and healthy development of their children. At the heart, Dads’ Resource Center is a children’s advocacy organization that aims to ensure that each child has the appropriate involvement and contributions from both of their parents.