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**Dads' Resource Center Calls for Statewide Standards for Court-Appointed Custody Guardians
Survey Reveals County-to-County Disparities, Lack of Transparency that Could Harm Children
in Custody Cases**

State College – Individuals who play a major role in the outcomes of child custody cases in Pennsylvania have virtually no oversight or professional standards in hiring or training, which could lead to potentially harmful consequences for thousands of children in the child welfare system, according to a new survey by the [Dads' Resource Center](#) (DRC).

The survey sought information from all 67 counties in order to identify individuals who serve in a guardian ad litem (GAL) capacity in custody cases for children in Children and Youth Services between 2015 and 2017 and the total number of cases and children served. Only 15 counties provided any information for the survey and of those some did not even track total cases or appointments, or denied part of the requests outright.

In Pennsylvania the court may appoint a guardian ad litem to represent the best interests of the child. That individual must be either a lawyer or social worker. However, there are no statewide standards for those hired in that capacity or for ongoing training or for releasing information about these taxpayer-funded positions.

“The survey reveals that there are significant differences from county to county in how they deal with these matters, how they record them and how they report them,” said Dr. Joel N. Myers, founder and Chairman of the Board for the Dads' Resource Center and founder and Chief Executive Officer of AccuWeather.

“This is problematic because we have no idea how children are impacted relative to having access to both parents. Research shows that mothers and fathers have different, yet equally important, roles in their children's development, success and happiness in life. Children who maintain healthy, quality relationships with both their mom and their dad experience better adjustment and more positive rates of development.

“Guardian ad litem have significant say in the decision that courts make about the custody of children, and we have no idea of how they are doing in ensuring children get the amount of access to both parents that they need.”

In 2015, a *Standards of Practice for Parents' Lawyers, Guardians ad litem, and Legal Counsel Practicing Child Welfare Dependency Cases* in Pennsylvania was adopted by a working group that covered client contact, caseloads and training. However, there is no clear oversight or monitoring of these individuals who play such a critical role in determining a child's future.

"There are no statewide standards and as a result there is no good data, no tracking and no way to identify trends," said executive director Jeff Steiner. "We don't even know how many custody decisions by Pennsylvania judges involved considerations that included the assessment or recommendation of a GAL. There are counties that do not even have a list of the GALs they use."

Dads' Resource Center is calling on the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC) to convene a working group of guardian ad litem, judges and children and family advocates for the purpose of:

- Developing standards to be recognized as a GAL;
- Developing standards for ongoing training to maintain status as a GAL; and,
- Developing a system of reporting to track (and quantify) the actions that GALs take on behalf of children.

"These standards would establish accounting in the use of GALs while providing accountability to a system currently cloaked in secrecy," said Steiner. "it would behoove a system with the mission to ensure the best interests of children to also ensure there is transparency and accountability, and operate in a manner that collects and makes available quantifiable data to illustrate the system is not, even if unintentionally, harming children in the way that it operates."

This is the fourth analysis of potential areas of biases against fathers within the civil, legal, government and human services systems in Pennsylvania released by the Dads Resource Center this year. In March the DRC released a [study](#) on the outcomes from custody rulings by the courts in 14 counties. In April the DRC released a [study](#) on the ratio of male to female staff in the offices of Children and Youth throughout the state. In June the DRC released a [survey](#) showing a similar pattern of inconsistencies in record keeping that obstructs the ability to assess if the misuse of PFAs unduly impacts fathers access to their children.

About Dads' Resource Center

The Dads' Resource Center was founded by Dr. Joel N. Myers, AccuWeather founder and chief executive officer. 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.

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