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14<sup>th</sup> January 2020

Janet Finch-Saunders AM  
Chair, Petitions Committee  
National Assembly for Wales  
Cardiff Bay  
Cardiff  
CF99 1NA

Dear Janet

**Petition P-05-751 Recognition of Parental Alienation**

Thank you for sharing with us the latest response dated 5<sup>th</sup> December 2019.

I would like to re-iterate our thanks to you and the Members of your Committee for the time and effort that you've devoted to our Petition. As previously stated we do not believe that Cafcass Cymru would have taken any action without the Committee's work.

It remains a disappointment that Cafcass Cymru refuse to use the term Parental Alienation in the guidance they have produced. This failure sends important messages about their commitment to protect children. <https://gov.wales/childrens-resistance-or-refusal-spend-time-parent-cafcass-cymru-practice-guidance> We continue to see wide variation in the responses from individual Family Court Advisers (FCAs) when the concept of Parental Alienation is raised in feedback from the hundred of service users who the charity supports in Wales. Some FCAs show a clear understanding of the dynamics of PA whilst others are reported as openly hostile or dismissive.

The extent to which the leadership of Cafcass Cymru accepts the concept of Parental Alienation and the impact on children is still unproven. Their decision to commission Cardiff University to produce a literature review in 2018 has been criticised by some as a cynical move to address the concerns raised by your Committee whilst casting doubt on this form of abuse. The fact that the guidance cannot even use the term Parental Alienation in the title indicates that at a senior level there may still be resistance to acknowledging the concept. That 'cultural' lead may influence individual practitioners to dismiss or downplay the use of the guidance.

It is encouraging to hear Cafcass Cymru state that the '**guidance will embed into practice and be used by family court advisors to aid their assessment, analysis and advice to the court in respect of children and their families**' and that they will '**ensure the practice guidance is kept fresh in the minds of our practitioners...**'

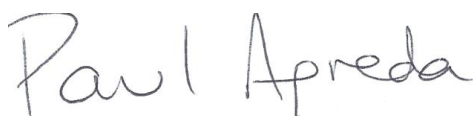
These are important commitments that the Welsh Government, through Cafcass Cymru, is giving to the Committee. We urge that you ask Cafcass Cymru to share with the Committee the results of the '**regular practice development sessions around its use....**' which they confirm have already commenced. In particular we suggest that a Results Based Accountability framework is adopted to report progress to the Committee. This would go a long way towards evidencing rather than asserting the value of the Guidance. We suggest the following indicators be proposed:

- Number and percentage of front line Family Court Advisers (FCAs) who have taken part in the 'regular practice development sessions' SPECIFICALLY on the 'Children's resistance or refusal to spend time with a parent' guidance.
- Qualitative Feedback from front line FCAs on their experience of the usefulness of the current guidance in their practice
- Feedback from parents and children / young people about the difference it has made for them in terms of the delivery of the service provided by Welsh Government through Cafcass Cymru. (\*)

(\*) a useful precedent for such feedback from service users may be the section on Family Court matters in the Welsh Government funded 'Are you listening and am I being heard?' report from Welsh Women's Aid in relation to the experience of Domestic Violence and Abuse.

Finally we must acknowledge that we are aware that Cafcass Cymru have invited the drama group who performed a theatrical interpretation on Parental Alienation for our charity in the Senedd in April 2019 to contribute a similar piece to their staff conference later this year. We hope that FCAs feedback on that performance may also be shared by Cafcass Cymru with the Committee.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Apreda".

NATIONAL MANAGER, BOTH PARENTS MATTER / IDVA, AEGIS DV