

For Immediate Release

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**CA NOW Demands Federal Investigation into Family Law System it Claims
Discriminates Against Women, Fails to Protect Abused Children**

California National Organization for Women (CA NOW) joins NOW New York State, California and national child advocacy groups, domestic violence agencies, and concerned legislators and individuals to publicly demand a federal probe of the American family court system.

“The family law courts are crippled and corrupt,” says CA NOW Executive Director, Helen Grieco. “They regularly deny women due process, use false syndromes to pathologize women and remove children from perfectly fit mothers, and generally value “fathers’ rights” over justice and the child’s best interests. Although family law codes expressly protect against retaliation for the presentation of abuse charges, women whose children tell the truth about their abuse often find themselves removed from their primary care provider, and sent to live with their abuser.”

CA NOW cites its Family Court Report 2002 (www.canow.org/fam.html), which studied 300 cases where mothers felt they had been discriminated against in California’s family court. Of the 300 cases CA NOW studied, 86% of cases involved domestic violence. Although a small number of the mothers surveyed eventually gained custody, the majority of the mothers surveyed had been stripped of their custodial rights, and many had been left with no contact with their child(ren). The use of false syndromes, like the pseudo-scientific “Parental Alienation Syndrome,” used to punish women whose children report abuse, was widely evident in the cases CA NOW studied, as was the denial of judges to consider all the evidence in abuse cases. CA NOW also points to the use of “extrajudicial personnel”—mediators, evaluators, and guardian ad litem—as part of the corruption problem in the courts.

“There is an extremely disturbing trend in this country that family law courts give custody to almost any father who fights for it. Even more disturbing, is that the more violent and unfit to parent, the more likely the father is to gain complete custody,” says Grieco. She cites an American Judges Association study that showed that in contested custody cases, fathers get custody 70% of the time.

“We demand a national investigation into the courts, to follow the money trail, which inevitably leads to the source of the problem. The misuse of federal funds, including “responsible fatherhood” funds, and visitation program dollars must be examined to see if their influence has interfered with the administration of justice,” said Grieco. “A federal investigation into the Constitutional and civil rights violations of mothers caught in the family court system is the best way to seek a remedy. Such an investigation could also reveal whether these abuses are part of a pattern of corruption, or even the deliberate exploitation of children.”

CA NOW points directly to the misuse of federal monies as violating both the spirit and the letter of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, under which the federal government financially supports the states in “developing, establishing, and operating programs designed to improve the handling of child abuse and neglect cases, particularly cases of child sexual abuse and exploitation in a manner which limits additional trauma to the child victim” (42 U.S.C. §§ 5106c(a)-(a)(1)). In fact, all too often, the family court system does the exact opposite.

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