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## **Cummings Foundation Launches Congressional Initiative to Fix Broken Family Courts**

### ***National Mailing & Policy Push Coincides with Florida Conference about Court Crisis & National TV Film Premiere***

In honor of Domestic Violence Awareness Month, the Cummings Foundation for Behavioral Health has launched a national initiative and Congressional advocacy campaign to address systemic failures in the U.S. family courts that are placing tens-of-thousands of children in harm's way each year.

"We had absolutely no idea until it touched our lives how bad this court system was," says Nick Cummings, president of the Cummings Foundation for Behavioral Health and former president of the American Psychological Association. "I saw what was happening, was chagrined by my own profession's involvement, and realized that thousands of other families were experiencing the same thing. We felt compelled to do something to fix it."

The goal of the Cummings Foundation's initiative is to develop policy solutions at the federal level that will address the crisis in a meaningful way. To ensure that our nation's top elected officials are made aware of the deep, systemic flaws that are harming more than 58,000 children per year in America's family courts, the Foundation has just mailed a comprehensive report about the crisis to all members of Congress, every state's Governor and Chief Justice, and thousands of law schools and forensic psychologists around the country. The report highlights their analyses of the U.S. family court's systemic flaws as presented by several esteemed lawyers, judges, psychologists and other experts who participated at the Foundation's "Our Broken Family Court System" conference in Phoenix, Arizona last March.

The book's authors describe a family court system that routinely places children into the sole physical and legal custody of unfit parents – even in cases involving serious allegations of sexual or physical abuse. Meanwhile, the courts are severely restricting or outright eliminating children's contact with their protective parents, further jeopardizing these children's safety.

Before the Sandusky scandal devoured national headlines, this epidemic received little attention, despite abundant evidence in the public record revealing the appalling extent of the problem.

"In the wake of Sandusky, we are seeing more emphasis put on bureaucracies' failure to protect children from sexual and physical abuse," says Nova Southeastern University professor Lenore Walker. "The Cummings Foundation's work to convene leaders from various disciplines to explore solutions to family court failures is long overdue."

### **October 26<sup>th</sup> Fort Lauderdale Conference to Launch Initiative**

The Cummings Foundation will kick off the national initiative at an October 26 conference at Nova Southeastern University in Fort Lauderdale about the family court's failure to protect children when domestic violence or abuse is alleged. The half-day conference will serve as a follow up to the March conference and bring together mental health professionals, judges, attorneys, doctors and academics to discuss how the family courts are failing children and victims of abuse, as well as policy solutions that will address the systemic problems.

### **October 29<sup>th</sup> *No Way Out But One* National Television Premiere**

The Florida conference will also feature a screening of the acclaimed documentary, [\*No Way Out But One\*](#) by renowned filmmaker and Boston University professor Garland Waller. *No Way Out But One* tells the incredible story of Holly Collins, an American mother who fled to the Netherlands with her three children. Holly received asylum after showing Dutch officials that an American family court ignored substantial medical evidence and placed her children into the sole custody of their identified abuser. *No Way Out But One* will make its national television debut at 8pm on October 29 on the Documentary Channel.

Whistleblowing former family court officials have recently joined forces with attorneys, therapists, child advocates and parents in speaking out about the harmful family courts. Unprecedented media coverage of this crisis from across the country is paving the way for a meaningful reform effort in the next Congress. Below is a small sampling of recent press stories about the crisis:

#### **SAN DIEGO, CA**

**FOX11 News Los Angeles** – 10/10/12 – Former family court judge speaks out about what really happens in family court (*run time 04:55*) [Click here to watch](#)

**FOX11 News Los Angeles** – 9/10/12 – Runaway Teen Damon's Story – Lost in the System (*run time 06:43*) [Click here to watch](#)

#### **CLEVELAND, OH**

**19 Action News Cleveland** – 10/1/12 – Kids threaten to kill themselves when family courts force them to live with their felon father (*run time 04:40*) [Click here to watch](#)

#### **NASHVILLE, TN**

**WSMV-TV Nashville** – 9/10/12 – Mother who became fugitive to protect son returns to court [Click here to read](#)

#### **MACOMB COUNTY, MI**

**Fox11 News Los Angeles** – 10/19/12 – Judge Scary Mary: Bad Behavior Behind the Bench (*run time 05:55*) [Click here to watch](#)

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