

Dear Judge Nash,

Please accept this letter as a formal request of investigation in the matter of a case that is currently being reviewed and processed through the Lancaster Children's Court.

The matter is involving a family member who is currently in foster care through the *Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS)*.

The child's name is [REDACTED] and the presiding *Referee* in this case is Valerie Skeba.

Background Information

My name is Kathy Keith and my husband's name is John Keith. We were the caregivers of [REDACTED] for the past 3 years. She is our maternal niece and our journey with this child dates back to the very first day she was born. Her mother, Charhonda [REDACTED] is my younger sister. Charhonda has struggled with many things, mainly addiction, which has led her down a path of many unfortunate decisions.

My husband and I have had a role in supporting Charhonda in raising [REDACTED] for some time until it was evident that Charhonda was not healthy enough to provide or care for [REDACTED]. Over the past 3 years we have provided an excellent home full of lots of love and support for [REDACTED]. When DCFS recommended that we take the position of permanent guardianship over [REDACTED], we accepted recommendation, and put forth and exhausted many efforts to meet the courts requirements.

While it is unfortunate that this type of decision had to be made, we made it with no hesitation. [REDACTED] is a fun, loving, beautiful little girl, and we would do anything for her. She is only eight (8) years old and full of so much life. We love her more than words can express.

Referee Skeba's Concerns

There were two major concerns that were impressed upon us by Referee Skeba and those were the child's *Health and Educational needs*. [REDACTED] is an overweight child who has struggled with overeating for a very long time. Prior to coming to our home she had severe asthma from second hand smoke, and was on several medications that were supposed to curb her appetite, but made her extremely sick. She had major emotional challenges dealing with not being able to be with her mom. Over time she was weaned off all of her medications, including Asthma.

[REDACTED] never went to school consistently until she was placed in our care. Through partnering with her school and getting her the proper help she needed, we discovered that [REDACTED] has a learning disability that the school is able to assist with, which, now which allows this child to go from failing to exceling in her school work.

All of this progression was achieved by our own efforts with little additional help from the state. We made these strides as a family. [REDACTED] is an overall much healthier little girl and much more happier child. She had begun losing weight and most importantly had become a more holistically healthier person. Being involved in extracurricular activities like YMCA basketball, swim lessons, as well as natural playing outside with her neighborhood friends had tremendously helped her along her path.

With a collaborative effort of ourselves, her school (Esperanza Elementary), and many other

family members. [REDACTED] was on her way to becoming a much healthier emotionally and physically fit little girl.

Referee Skeba's Actions

All of that was interrupted the day Referee Skeba removed [REDACTED] from our home on

November 7, 2012. Our family and hearts have been broken. Most importantly [REDACTED] has been hurt and broken.

On our last court date October 25, 2012 with Referee Skeba, she displayed *very abusive and aggressive behavior towards us to the point of her rising out of her seat and yelling erroneous information at us*. She not only accused us of being unfit parents, but also accused us of not complying with her or any of the court's requests. This was baffling to me since we had exceeded all of the court's requests.

Being parents of 5 wonderful children whom we love very deeply, and now having [REDACTED] and treating her as our own, it was most shocking to hear as a parent, that someone we love [REDACTED] *has diabetes*. This was something that was shouted out by Referee Skeba and when I responded, pleading with her to read my paperwork, *and that [REDACTED] did not have diabetes*. She not only put my husband and me out of the courtroom, she then advised the bailiff to dismiss us until our next court date on December 5, 2012.

A few hours later we were blind-sided with a phone call from [REDACTED]'s Social worker that Referee Skeba had made the decision to remove [REDACTED] from our home within 7 days with no option to be placed with any of our family. This seemed unjust to us and after pleading with [REDACTED] attorney Amber Walker, she was able to file a 388 to at least have [REDACTED] not go to foster care with strangers, but to be allowed to be placed with someone in our family.

As it stands now, [REDACTED]'s current caregivers are my daughter and son-in-law, Corey and Latorra Saxton. Although they are great parents and overall great human beings, we can't ignore the fact that their home is not [REDACTED]'s home.

It seems like [REDACTED]'s needs and overall well-being are not being strongly considered. *My husband and I, as well as the Saxton's, DCFS and CASA all agree that [REDACTED] should be allowed to be placed back in her home*. She deserves the very best and it is our hope that you can offer some sort of resolve to get [REDACTED] back in her home with us.

Referee Skeba's Malicious and Vindictive Decision

The decision to remove this loving child from our home was simply malicious and vindictive on the part of Referee Skeba. It was more personal than anything else. By me speaking up in Judge Skeba's courtroom and pointing out the fact that [REDACTED] did not nor did she ever have "diabetes," this angered Referee Skeba to the point of her issuing an order to have [REDACTED] removed from our home that same day. This, in short, is the ONLY reason why [REDACTED] has been removed from her loving home.

What this investigation will reveal

We know that when you investigate this matter, you will learn that we as guardians of [REDACTED] followed every court order requested of us by Referee Skeba; that [REDACTED] never missed any doctor appointments; that [REDACTED]'s grades were improving in school while in our care; that DCFS, CASA and [REDACTED]'s attorney all believe and agree that the BEST place for [REDACTED] to be is in the home she knows, loves and with which she has most familiarity; and that Referee Skeba's actions against us were simply personal and unrelated to the care and concern of [REDACTED]'s well-being.

We hope you will investigate how such an atrocity like this could happen to a family like ours, and that appropriate action is taken with respect to the unprofessional behavior of Referee Skeba.

We look forward to hearing from you regarding this most urgent and important matter. [REDACTED]'s well-being is at stake.

Respectfully,

Kathy and John Keith

[REDACTED]