



CITY OF DETROIT

MARY SHEFFIELD

COUNCIL PRESIDENT

MEMORANDUM

To: David Whitaker, Director, Legislative Policy Division

Through: Latisha Johnson, Chair, Internal Operations Standing Committee

From: Council President Mary Sheffield submitting memorandum relative to

Date: 10/10/2024

RE: Request for Resolution Proclaiming November as Family Court Awareness Month

SUMMARY:

November is Family Court Awareness Month, an excellent opportunity for the City of Detroit to reaffirm its commitment to recognizing the importance of a family court system that prioritizes child safety and always acts in the best interest of children.

While the Council approved a similar resolution in October 2022, I would like to have a new resolution drafted this year to ensure this vital cause remains at the forefront of our awareness.

Please review the information provided below and draft an official resolution proclaiming November as Family Court Awareness Month in Detroit. Protective Parents of Michigan have supplied draft resolution language for your reference, which is included below.

WHEREAS, the mission of Family Court Awareness Month (FCAM) is to raise awareness about the importance of a family court system that prioritizes child safety and acts in the best interests of children. FCAM also aims to improve recognition among court professionals, legislators, and the public that family court decisions have profound and lasting impacts on the lives of children

and families, making it essential that these decisions are informed by the latest research and best practices in child safety;

WHEREAS, *an estimated 58,000 children in the U.S. are ordered into unsupervised contact with abusive parents each year, resulting in hundreds of child murders during visitation with a dangerous parent. In Michigan, 39 children have been killed by a parent since 2008 during divorce or custody disputes;*

WHEREAS, *in August 2024, 6-year-old Rowan Morey of Caledonia, Michigan, was not returned to his mother after his father's parenting time. A search led police to discover that Rowan had been shot and killed by his father, who then took his own life. Rowan's mother had previously reported the father's abusive behavior to both family court and Child Protective Services;*

WHEREAS, *in August 2022, 16-month-old Chaos Demilo McCarthy was murdered by his father in Genesee County. A Genesee County judge had awarded the father temporary custody just weeks before the boy's death, despite the father's prior felony conviction;*

WHEREAS, *in September 2021, 3-year-old Dylan Thebo was fatally shot by his father in a murder-suicide during court-ordered visitation in Kent County. Dylan's mother had made repeated efforts to report her ex-husband's abuse and threats to six different entities;*

WHEREAS, *in 2015, the Tsimhoni children's abuse claims were dismissed by the Oakland County Family Court, and the children were sent to juvenile hall for resisting visitation with their father. Controversial reunification therapy was ordered, which mandates reconciliation with alleged abusers. This therapy, which is not evidence-based, has been shown to be detrimental and despite findings of judicial misconduct in the case, reunification therapy is still frequently ordered by family courts;*

WHEREAS, *Kent County, Michigan, following six domestic violence-related homicides within three months in 2021, recognized the need for a specialized Domestic Violence Court. This court, staffed by individuals knowledgeable about the intricacies of domestic violence, aims to support victims and families, hold offenders accountable, and prevent further homicides;*

WHEREAS, *the mission of Family Court Awareness Month (FCAM) is to promote judicial education and awareness about the necessity of using scientifically validated, evidence-based treatment programs that are proven to be safe and effective. This education should include training on domestic violence, child abuse (emotional, psychological, physical, and sexual), childhood trauma, coercive control, and post-separation abuse for judges and all professionals involved in family court cases;*

WHEREAS, *FCAM is dedicated to educating judges and family court professionals on the importance of incorporating evidence-based, peer-reviewed research into their decision-making. This includes the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Study (Vincent Felitti, Kaiser Permanente-CDC), Child Custody Evaluators' Beliefs About Domestic Abuse Allegations (Daniel Saunders, University of Michigan), and Child Custody Outcomes in Cases Involving Parental Alienation and Abuse Allegations (Joan S. Meier, GW Law School). This research reveals a prevalent gender bias against mothers who report abuse in family courts, despite false allegations being rare, and emphasizes the need for impartial decision-making to protect children's well-being;*

***WHEREAS,** Family Court Awareness Month aims to encourage collaboration among legislators, advocates, professionals, and the community to improve family court practices, ensuring they are guided by evidence-based research and prioritize the safety and best interests of children;*

NOW, THEREFORE, I, _____, hereby declare the Month of NOVEMBER to be FAMILY COURT AWARENESS MONTH.

DEPARTMENTAL CONTACT:

Name: Yvonne Ragland

Position: Junior Policy Analyst