

EXHIBIT ~~387~~ 9
DATE 1/24/2011
HB 281

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee,

My name is Donna Findlay. I live in McAllister, MT, and am the grandmother of a child who was assigned a GAL. My grandson, Taylor, came to live with me when he was 9 yrs old, because my daughter was unable to parent him. Taylor lived with me for two years in Bozeman, where he was enrolled in school and sports, and attended weekly family therapy sessions with me.

At this time my daughter, Taylor's mother, decided she no longer wanted Taylor living with me, and the case was referred to a judge in Butte, where she was living. The judge assigned a GAL to Taylor's case. The GAL made no attempt to conduct an investigation into the case, while blindly issuing recommendations for me to follow to enable Taylor to continue living with me.

Over the course of the next few years, Taylor was moved back and forth between my home and foster care, eventually being placed into a group home, with the GAL never taking a stand to represent his wish to stay with me. I called the GAL more than once to tell her that Taylor needed, and was asking for, her help. She responded by telling me she couldn't talk to me, and never contacted Taylor.

Unfortunately Taylor's response to not being heard was to get into trouble. While in the group home, he was caught with a gun at his school, and became involved with drugs and alcohol.

In our case, I feel strongly that the GAL failed to provide the assistance my grandson desperately needed, and asked for. He needed an advocate. He needed a GAL. But he needed a GAL equipped with the training and education to understand and be effective, equipped with guidelines to follow in order to provide for Taylor's best interests. Taylor is now 17 years old, and, I'm afraid, heading for a difficult adulthood. I have lost my home. I've exhausted all of my assets, fighting to help my grandson when the GAL would not. Changing the current system is essential, to be able to provide help for families like ours', with children like Taylor.

Respectfully,

Donna Findlay
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