

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, my name is Alice Lozeau. I live in Ravalli County.

I hired an attorney to help me fight for custody of my daughter and he suggested we get a GAL. My ex and his attorney got to pick the GAL that was assigned. From the start I felt the GAL was representing my ex husband instead of our child. The GAL told me he was not qualified or suited to interview my daughter because he had no experience or background in child psychology or anything else that might qualify him. So how was he going to represent my daughter, if he didn't take the time to get to know her? The GAL was supposed to spend time in both of our homes observing our interactions with our daughter. The GAL did this in my ex's home, but not mine. The GAL put me down for living in a trailer and he told me I didn't make enough money to support my daughter. So it was his opinion that my daughter was better off with my ex.

I do not know what pay scale the GAL followed, it seemed as though he charged whatever he wanted. My ex and I were each responsible for paying 50% of the bill. If my ex's attorney called the GAL, I was charged for half of whatever that phone call cost and vice versa. I believe he charged us for e-mails as well. My ex and I split the cost of every minute the GAL spent on our case. I had to set up a payment plan with the GAL for \$100 a month and if I do not pay on time, I am charged 10% interest. There were times that I called the GAL and he would not answer or return my calls. It got to the point where the only time he called me was after I complained to my attorney. Only then would the GAL return my calls and then lie by saying he did not receive my messages.

The GAL had no previous training and I don't even know who his supervisor was or who he had to answer to. I remember the judge told him that he had the authority to make decisions and that he needed to do that. The GAL would say he was going to do something, but there would be no follow through. The whole process seemed one-sided, always in my ex-husband's favor.

Montana GALs should have qualification and fee guidelines. They should have supervision to make sure they are treating people fairly and not just charging money to do whatever they want. For almost 3 years I paid (am paying) a GAL for nothing, he just up and quit and I am still trying to pay off his bill. I am still fighting for custody of my daughter, I now have a pro bono criminal attorney, but she has never represented anyone in a custody case. I do not have any money to hire a good lawyer who is familiar with custody cases. My daughter is now seven years old and living in Idaho with her father. My daughter is suffering mental anguish. I have no power to do anything and do not know where to turn for help.

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