

Teen Ends Up in Wheelchair After Government Snatches Her From Family

On Monday, Mat Staver, founder and chairman of Liberty Counsel, appeared before a juvenile court to defend the family of Justina Pelletier against abuse by the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families (DCF).

The 15-year-old ice-skating competitor was taken from her parents by DCF, held for over a year, and is now confined to a wheelchair because of maltreatment for a metabolic disorder—simply because her family questioned a diagnosis.

Justina's father, Lou Pelletier, recently spoke to the media about the tragic case involving DCF and Boston Children's Hospital.

Seeking to silence the parents, DCF then filed a complaint to hold the father in contempt of court for violating an alleged gag order that was never put in writing.

"The very purpose of the First Amendment's protections is to protect citizens against this kind of governmental oppression," Staver says. "DCF's motion for contempt is nothing more than an attempt to prevent the public from gaining access to information concerning the state's unconstitutional intrusion into the fundamental parental rights of the Pelletiers and to extend the secrecy of these proceedings."

"There is simply no justification for such a gross violation of the presumption of public access to judicial proceedings," Staver continues. "The story of Justina Pelletier is like a horror movie."

Before she was admitted to Boston Children's Hospital, Justina was being treated for mitochondrial disease, a rare genetic disorder, by Dr. Mark Korson, the chief of metabolism at Tufts Medical Center.

At Boston Children's Hospital, a new doctor, in the seventh month of his internship, changed the working diagnosis from mitochondrial disease to somatoform disorder, shifting Justina's treatment from physical to mental. When Lou and Linda Pelletier tried to discharge their daughter the following day, Feb. 14, 2013, and return her to care at Tufts Medical Center, DCF took Justina as a ward of the state and moved her to Bader Five, the psychiatric ward, where she remained for 11 months.

Currently Justina is confined at Wayside Youth and Family Support, a nonmedical treatment facility. She is suffering every day with excruciating pain, and her health is rapidly declining.

"The state of Massachusetts cannot make Justina a prisoner merely because her parents followed the medical protocols recommended and administered by a respected medical institution responsible for her care," Staver says.

"The more light shed on the situation, the more it becomes apparent that the behavior of DCF and Boston Children's Hospital is indefensible."