



## **Bring "The Keeping Children Safe From Family Violence Act" aka VAWA "Kayden's Law" to your state.**

"Kayden's Law" is named after Kayden Mancuso, a 7-year-old girl from Bucks County, Pennsylvania who was murdered by her father during court-ordered unsupervised custody time, which was granted despite the mother raising safety concerns during proceedings. Kayden's mother, Kathy Sherlock submitted evidence to the court of the father's abusive, violent history – including criminal records and a protection from abuse order for his threatening to kill family members - but he was nevertheless granted unsupervised contact with little Kayden. The father then beat Kayden to death and tied a bag over her head, leaving a note of retribution on her body.

Unfortunately, Kayden's story is not unique and many children have been preventably killed like this by a dangerous parent who was awarded custody. It is estimated that each year in the U.S. tens of thousands of children are court-ordered into the custody of an abusive parent, frequently without supervision or other safeguards in place. Furthermore, throughout the world, dangerous parents are using family court systems to harm children and former partners, continuing their post-separation abuse with little oversight and accountability. While these problems have been widely studied and documented, children continue to be sent into harms way.

## **The Keeping Children Safe From Family Violence Act or "Kayden's Law" in VAWA provides federal funds to states which improve their child custody laws in order to better protect at-risk children by:**

1. Restricting expert testimony to only those who are appropriately qualified to provide it. Evidence from court-appointed or outside professionals regarding alleged abuse may be admitted only when the professional possesses demonstrated expertise and experience in working with victims of domestic violence or child abuse, including child sexual abuse.
2. Limiting the use of reunification camps and therapies which cannot be proven to be safe and effective. No "reunification treatment" may be ordered by the court without scientifically valid and generally accepted proof of the safety, effectiveness and therapeutic value of the particular treatment.
3. Providing evidence-based ongoing training to judges and court personnel on family violence subject matter, including:
  - (i) child sexual abuse;
  - (ii) physical abuse;
  - (iii) emotional abuse;
  - (iv) coercive control;
  - (v) implicit and explicit bias;
  - (vi) trauma;
  - (vii) long and short-term impacts of domestic violence and child abuse on children; and
  - (viii) victim and perpetrator behaviors.
4. Requiring that family courts consider the existence of protection from abuse orders when making custody

### **Next Steps:**

Please email the National Safe Parents Organization at [advocacy@nationalsafeparents.org](mailto:advocacy@nationalsafeparents.org) and they will connect you with advocate coordinators in your state. Policy experts from the National Family Violence Law Center at GW Law, who provided the technical expertise for Kayden's Law in both the Violence Against Women's Act (VAWA) and in Pennsylvania, are available to provide assistance to your state lawmakers. Advocates from the National Safe Parents Coalition can support you along the way to bring this important legislation to your state. Thank you for advocating for safer laws for children in your state!