# Superior Court of Washington County of King

In re:

MICHELLE WATTS,

Petitioner,

and,

MICHAEL GANTINE,

Respondent.

NO. 17-3-01263-1 SEA

Memorandum in Response to Petitioner's Motion for Reconsideration of 4/7/17 Order on UCCJEA Jurisdiction Determination

The Respondent, by and through his attorney, Natalie Roberts, respectfully submits this Memorandum in Response to the Petitioner's April 8, 2017 Motion for Reconsideration ("Motion").

The petitioner's Motion fundamentally misunderstands both the court's April 7, 2017 Order on UCCJEA Jurisdiction Determination and the law surrounding UCCJEA jurisdictional determinations. Because the petitioner's Motion is so devoid of any basis in law or fact to make it a baseless filing, CR 11 sanctions should be issued against the Petitioner and/or her attorney for filing Petitioner's Motion.

### BRIEF FACTUAL BACKGROUND

The petitioner filed a Petition for Establishment of a Parenting Plan...and/or Child Support ("Petition for Parenting Plan") in Washington State on March 3, 2017. In her Petition for Parenting Plan, the petitioner requested that this court exercise home state jurisdiction over the parties' child, or temporary emergency jurisdiction. *See* Petition for Parenting Plan at 4. On

Response Memo Page 1 of 14

March 7, 2017, the petitioner filed a Motion for Temporary Orders, requesting, among other things, that this court enter a temporary parenting plan placing the child in petitioner's primary care and enter a temporary restraining order between the respondent and his child. *See* Motion for Temporary Family Law Order and Restraining Order at 2-3.

Prior to filing her Motion for Temporary Orders, on January 30, 2017 the petitioner sought and was granted an ex parte temporary order of protection protecting the respondent from having contact with both the petitioner and her child. *See* Petition for Order of Protection in Cause No. 17-2-01981-0. At the return hearing on the petitioner's ex parte order, the court declined to exercise jurisdiction over the child and stayed any portion of the ex parte order which purported to apply to the child. *See* Reissuance of Temporary Order for Protection in Cause No. 17-2-01981-0. The reissued order was continued to allow the parties to resolve UCCJEA issues. *See Id.* 

Throughout her pleadings with this court the petitioner has either obfuscated or failed to explain several key facts to the court:

- 1. There was a valid and enforceable court order out of DuPage County court in Illinois dated February 29, 2016 which placed the child in the father's primary care. See Ex. A, previously filed with this court.
- 2. The petitioner took the child out of DuPage County, contrary to court orders and contrary to Illinois law (*see* Decl. of Michelle Watts in Support of Motion for Temporary Orders at 8). Any claim by the mother that she did not know about the Illinois order is a lie. When the Bellevue Police Department found the mother pursuant to the national missing child search for the parties' child, the mother claimed she took the child contrary to the Illinois order because the respondent was "deep in

the mob" and that the respondent's "mob connections paid off the Illinois Judges and the assigned Guardian Ad Litem." *See* Sealed Confidential Reports in Cause No. 17-2-01981-0 at 7. The petitioner also lied to the Bellevue Police Department claiming she was in the witness protection program. *Id.* 

- 3. The petitioner sought a Domestic Violence Protection Order from this court three days after the Bellevue Police Department found the petitioner and the child on January 27, 2017 at the petitioner's Bellevue residence, where the petitioner had been illegally concealing the child due to a national missing child's search. *Petition for Order of Protection* in cause no. 17-2-01981-0 KNT. The petitioner failed to tell the court in her January 30, 2017 Petition for a Domestic Violence Protection Order that the child was removed from her care on January 27<sup>th</sup> pursuant to a missing child investigation from DuPage County Illinois. *Id.*
- 4. The petitioner's request for a permanent Domestic Violence Protection Order in the DuPage County court proceeding was denied on April 20, 2015 after a full hearing in which both parties were present and presented arguments to the court. See Ex. B, previously filed with the court.
- 5. The reason that the respondent had no contact with the child for 15 months leading up to the mother's filing her Petition for a Parenting Plan with this court is because the mother deliberately concealed the child from the respondent and law enforcement through the use a fake name for the child, forged birth certificate for the child, and a fake name for herself. *See* Sealed Confidential Reports in Cause No. 17-2-01981-0.

This matter is now before the court on the petitioner's request that this court reconsider its April 7, 2017 Order which dismissed the Petition for Parenting Plan for lack of jurisdiction.

> Response Memo Page 4 of 14

#### EVIDENCE RELIED UPON

This memorandum is based on the record and file in King County Superior Court cause numbers 17-3-01263-1 SEA, 17-2-01981-0 KNT, and 17-2-03892-0.

## **ARGUMENT**

The petitioner's motion for reconsideration comes before this court without any basis in fact and law and should therefore, be denied. Furthermore, because the petitioner's motion violates CR 11, the respondent should be awarded his reasonable attorney's fees for defending against a baseless motion.

1. There is no basis to grant reconsideration under CR59(a)(7) because the court properly concluded that Washington State does not have jurisdiction under the UCCJEA.

CR 59(a)(7) provides that a court may reconsider its prior decision when "there is no evidence or reasonable inference from the evidence to justify the...decision, or that it is contrary to law." The petitioner's argument that CR 59(a)(7) applies to this case because Washington State is the child's home state and the court therefore misapplied the law by declining to exercise jurisdiction under the UCCJEA is fundamentally flawed in at least a few respects. First, home state jurisdiction does not apply to this matter. Second, even if home state jurisdiction did apply, the petitioner's unjustifiable conduct nullifies any argument the petitioner has for home state jurisdiction. And third, Illinois was exercising jurisdiction under the UCCJEA when a proceeding was commenced in Washington State and as such, only the Illinois court can decide to give up jurisdiction – the Washington State court cannot wrest jurisdiction from Illinois.

(a) Home state jurisdiction does not apply to this action.

Home state jurisdiction applies when a court is making an "initial child custody determination" pursuant to RCW 26.27.201. The UCCJEA further defines "initial determination" to mean "the first child custody determination concerning a particular child."

This court was not making an "initial child custody determination." There is a valid and enforceable court order from DuPage County Illinois which made a child custody determination. Even prior to the DuPage County Illinois decision there was a valid and enforceable court order from Broward County, Florida. Because there are two prior custody determinations involving the child in this matter, this court cannot be in the position of making an "initial child custody determination." As such, home state jurisdiction pursuant to RCW 26.27.201 cannot be a basis for this court to obtain jurisdiction over the parties' child.

(b) The 15-month period of time during which the petitioner deliberately concealed the child from the court, law enforcement, and the respondent should not be a basis for home state jurisdiction.

Even if this court could use home state jurisdiction as a basis to obtain jurisdiction, the period of time from November 2015 to February 2017 when the mother deliberately and intentionally hid the child from the Illinois court, law enforcement officials, and the respondent should not be used as a basis for awarding her home state jurisdiction.

### RCW 26.27.271 provides that:

- (1) Except as otherwise provided in RCW 26.27.231<sup>1</sup> or by other law of this state, if a court of this state has jurisdiction under this chapter because a person seeking to invoke its jurisdiction has engaged in unjustifiable conduct, the court shall decline to exercise its jurisdiction unless:
- (a) The parents and all persons acting as parents have acquiesced in the exercise of jurisdiction;
- (b) A court of the state otherwise having jurisdiction under RCW 26.27.201 through 26.27.221 determines that this state is a more appropriate forum under RCW 26.27.261; or
- (c) No court of any other state would have jurisdiction under the criteria specified in RCW 26.27.201 through 26.27.221.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> RCW 26.27.231 addresses temporary emergency jurisdiction which is not at issue here.

1.3

 In this case, none of the three exceptions in RCW 26.27.271(1)(a)-(c) apply.

In this case, the petitioner engaged in unjustifiable conduct in taking the child out of Illinois without giving proper notice to the Illinois court; without telling the respondent where she was going; deliberately concealing the child from the court, law enforcement, and the respondent by adopting an alias for herself, adopting an alias for the child, forging a birth certificate for the child; lying to law enforcement when she was finally found pursuant to a national missing child search; and at least obfuscating if not lying to this court regarding the facts surrounding this action.

None of the three exceptions apply to allow the court to exercise jurisdiction despite the petitioner's unjustifiable conduct. The parties do not agree to Washington asserting jurisdiction. This court has not determined it is a more appropriate forum. And, as is explained below, a court of another state, namely Illinois, has jurisdiction under the criteria in RCW 26.27.201 through 26.27.221. Thus, even if the petitioner's argument that home state jurisdiction applies to this matter, were correct, which it is not, this court could not exercise home state jurisdiction due to the petitioner's unjustifiable conduct.

(c) Illinois has continuing jurisdiction under the UCCJEA.

There are several provisions of the UCCJEA which work together to inform courts on how to proceed when a proceeding is commenced in one state when a proceeding was previously commenced in another state. When there are two, simultaneous proceedings, RCW 26.27.251 applies. RCW 26.27.251 directs a court who is asked to exercise jurisdiction under the UCCJEA, but learns of an ongoing proceeding in the court of another state that has jurisdiction in substantial conformity with the UCCJEA, to not exercise jurisdiction until the two courts communicate. RCW 26.27.251(1), (2). The court of this state can only take jurisdiction from

the other court if *the other* court determines that this court is a more appropriate forum. RCW 26.27.251(2).

The UCCJEA also has a section which determines when a court has exclusive, continuing jurisdiction. This is codified as RCW 26.27.211. However, because RCW 26.27.251 applies to simultaneous proceedings, it appears that RCW 26.27.211 only applies when a proceeding in one state is completed and a new proceeding is commenced.

In this case, at the time the Washington state action was commenced, the Illinois action was still ongoing because no final order has been entered in that case. As such, RCW 26.27.251 applies. There is no argument that Illinois did not have proper jurisdiction in 2012. In fact, the petitioner repeatedly invokes the validity of the Illinois orders as proof of domestic violence, up until April 20, 2015 when she was lost in court and was denied a permanent protection order and ordered to begin reunification efforts for the child with the respondent. Therefore, because Illinois had jurisdiction in substantial conformity with the UCCJEA at the time this action was commenced, this court properly determined that there was a proceeding in the court of another state with jurisdiction.

This court then properly held a conference with the Illinois court on April 7, 2017 (*see below* re petitioner's claims that the conference was not proper). And, this court's finding after that conference, namely that Illinois has and is still exercising jurisdiction, that Illinois is the home state, and that Illinois expressly requested to maintain jurisdiction are all proper findings that should not be reconsidered. As explained above, Illinois has jurisdiction by virtue of the petitioner invoking the court's jurisdiction in 2012. The petitioner's decision – made after she did not get rulings in her favor – to take the child and deliberately conceal him from the court, law enforcement, and the respondent does not operate to divest the Illinois court of its proper

jurisdiction. The fact remains that there is still an ongoing child custody case in Illinois. And, it does appear that when the petitioner invoked Illinois' jurisdiction over the child in 2012, Illinois was the child's home state. Lastly, as RCW 26.27.251 makes clear, because Illinois is exercising jurisdiction in substantial conformity with the UCCJEA, the only court that can decide to change jurisdiction is Illinois. As the April 7, 2017 order indicates, the Illinois court "expressly reserve[d] and retaine[d] its exclusive and continuing jurisdiction over the minor child." In other words, Illinois stated its' desire to retain jurisdiction and did not find that Washington State is a more appropriate forum.

It was therefore proper for this court, under RCW 26.27.251(2) to abide by the Illinois court's decision that this court is NOT a more appropriate forum for child custody proceedings, and dismiss the child custody proceeding in this state.

Because this court properly applied the UCCJEA, RCW 26.27 *et seq.*, to the facts of this case, there is no basis under CR 59(a)(7) for the court to reconsider its April 7, 2017 Order on UCCJEA Jurisdiction Determination.

2. There is no basis to grant reconsideration under CR59(a)(1) because the court properly conducted a UCCJEA conference pursuant to RCW 26.27.251(2).

CR 59(a)(1) allows a court to reconsider its decision due to "[i]rregularity in the proceedings of the court...or adverse party, or any order of the court, or abuse of discretion, by which such party was prevented from having a fair trial." Just as her argument that the court misapplied the law is meritless, so too is the petitioner's argument that this court did not properly conduct a UCCJEA conference with the Illinois court devoid of any basis in fact or law.

The petitioner argues that this court did not conduct a proper conference under RCW 26.27.101 because this court (1) did not let the parties participate and (2) did not allow the

parties to present facts and legal arguments before it made its decision and (3) did not notify the parties of the law. None of these three arguments holds any water.

As explained above, when this court earned of an ongoing proceeding in Illinois involving child custody, the court properly commenced communication with the Illinois court under RCW 26.27.251(2). RCW 26.27.101 governs how the communication between courts should be conducted. Specifically, this section states:

- (1) A court of this state may communicate with a court in another state concerning a proceeding arising under this chapter.
- (2) The court *may allow* the parties to participate in the communication. If the parties are not able to participate in the communication, they must be given the opportunity to present facts and legal arguments before a decision on jurisdiction is made.
- (3) Communication between courts on schedules, calendars, court records, and similar matters may occur without informing the parties. A record need not be made of the communication.
- (4) Except as otherwise provided in subsection (3) of this section, a record must be made of a communication under this section. The parties must be informed promptly of the communication and granted access to the record.
- (5) For the purposes of this section, "record" means information that is inscribed on a tangible medium or that is stored in an electronic or other medium and is retrievable in perceivable form (*emphasis added*).

A plain reading of the statute against the petitioner's argument indicates the frivolity of the petitioner's arguments.

First, the petitioner's claim that this court did not conduct a proper conference because it did not let the parties participate is invalidated by RCW 26.27.101(2) which states only that the court "may allow" the parties to participate in the communication. Furthermore, RCW 26.27.101(3) provides that any communication regarding "schedules, calendars, court records, and similar matters may occur without informing the parties." Thus, the court is only directed to allow the parties to participate in its UCCJEA communication with another court at its discretion and the court is specifically allowed to keep certain communication out of the purview of the

27

28

parties. Thus, the petitioner's argument that the court did not properly conduct a UCCJEA conference because it did not allow the parties to participate has no basis in law.

Second, the court did not properly conduct a UCCJEA conference because it did not allow the parties to present facts and legal arguments prior to issuing its April 7, 2017 order is not correct. The parties both, and particularly the petitioner submitted extensive pleadings to the court prior to April 7, 2017. The respondent submitted a 17 page (not including attachments) Brief and Declaration to the court on April 3, 2017. The petitioner submitted a "Supplemental Declaration of Michelle Wats in Support of UCCJEA Call" on April 3, 2017. This Supplemental Declaration was four pages long and contained 141 pages of exhibits. This "Supplemental Declaration" was presumably a supplement to the petitioner's initial 12 page declaration which contained over 200 pages of exhibits. Thus, the parties both submitted extensive briefing and declarations to this court prior to the UCCJEA conference on April 7, 2017. The petitioner may be arguing that the parties should be allowed an opportunity to present oral argument prior to the UCCJEA conference. However, the petitioner provides no, and there is no, support for her argument in the law. Because the parties did in fact provide briefing and declarations regarding the facts and each party's legal argument before the court made its April 7, 2017 decision, the petitioner's argument that the court did not allow the parties this opportunity fails.

Lastly, the petitioner's argument that the court has a duty to inform litigants of the law is incorrect. The court is not a legal adviser to a party. The court is the decider. It would in fact, be improper for this court to advise either party as to the law. And in this case, each party was represented by competent, experienced counsel. Furthermore, it is apparent that each party was aware of their ability to provide briefing and declaration to the court before the UCCJEA conference because each party did in fact provide such briefing. There is thus, no basis in fact or

23

24

25

26

27

28

law for the petitioner's claim that the court did not properly conduct a UCCJEA conference because it did not advise the parties of the law.

3. There is no basis to grant reconsideration under CR59(a)(2) due to the respondent's alleged misconduct.

There is also no basis for this court to reconsider its decision under CR 59(a)(2) which provides that a court can reconsider a decision due to the prevailing party's misconduct. What the petitioner is characterizing as misconduct is actually a factual dispute that she lost and does not agree with. The petitioner's claim that the respondent is "perpetuat[ing] fraud on the court" because "he is a domestic violence perpetrator...yet he fraudulently obtained an order in February of 2016 in Illinois" is an absurd portrayal of the Illinois court decision. On April 20, 2015, the parties attended a full, contested hearing regarding the issue of whether a domestic violence protection order ("DVPO") should be granted. The court disagreed with the petitioner and dismissed her DVPO action. The court also ordered reunification counseling to begin for the child and the father. Instead of abiding by the court's ruling, the petitioner took the child and refused to follow the court orders she did not like. She is now, coming before this court, arguing that the factual findings against her in Illinois are fraudulent. There is no basis for the petitioner's claims of fraud. And even if there was a basis for the petitioner's claims, the proper court to argue about the fraudulent nature of the Illinois court proceedings is Illinois, not Washington State. This court cannot second guess the valid order of Illinois. Doing so would violate Article IV, Section 1 of the United States Constitution.<sup>2</sup>

Similar to her meritless argument that a factual dispute on which she lost could only be perpetuated through fraud, the petitioner's argument that the respondent should be punished for

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Known as the "Full Faith and Credit Clause" this section provides that "Full Faith and Credit shall be given in each State to the public Acts, Records, and judicial Proceedings of every other State. And the Congress may by general Laws prescribe the Manner in which such Acts, Records and Proceedings shall be proved, and the Effect thereof."

20 21

23

24

22

25

26

27

28

the 15-month period of time in which his child was concealed from him is without merit. The reason the respondent did not seek a Writ of Habeas Corpus for almost a year was because he had no idea where the child was. By her own admission, in November 2015 the petitioner took the child to Washington state. She then enrolled the child in school under an alias, used a forged birth certificate, and assumed an alias herself. The respondent commenced a missing child case with the DuPage County Illinois Sheriff department. There were missing child posters of the parties' child distributed in the National Crime Information Center database. And, when the respondent finally did find the child on January 27, 2017, the petitioner was in this court three days later, seeking a DVPO without providing the court the full background of this case. If anyone improperly ripped the child out of one parent's care, it was the petitioner ripping the child out of the respondent's care after his 15-month long search to find the child was finally successful.

The petitioner's claim that the respondent is the party who perpetuated misconduct and that the respondent should be punished for the period of time that the petitioner was hiding the child is simply abhorrent and without merit.

Because there was no misconduct by the respondent, and in fact, only misconduct on the part of the petitioner, this court should not reconsider its April 7, 2017 Order on UCCJEA Jurisdiction Determination pursuant to CR 59(a)(2).

# 4. There is no basis to grant reconsideration under CR59(a)(9).

CR 59(a)(9) provides that a court may reconsider its decision when "substantial justice has not been done." However, this provision is not meant to be a "catch-all" provision to justify a party's argument when no other provision of CR 59 applies. It is well settled in this state that courts only "rarely grant reconsideration under CR 59(a)(9) for lack of substantial justice

because of the other broad grounds afforded under CR 59(a)." Sligar v. Odell, 156 Wn. App. 720, 734, 233 P.3d 914 (2010).

In this case, the petitioner merely restates her arguments for relief under other sections of CR59(a) as a basis for reconsideration under CR 59(a)(9). Because the petitioner provides no new argument, she is attempting to merely use CR 59(a)(9) as a catch-all provision. The petitioner's attempt to use CR59(a)(9) as a catch all is not proper and should not be adopted by this court. As such, the petitioner's argument that the court should reconsider its decision under CR59(a)(9) should be denied.

5. The court should award attorney's fees to the respondent for having to defend against a motion which was filed in violation of CR 11.

CR 11(a) provides, in relevant part, that:

The signature of a party or of an attorney constitutes a certificate by the party or attorney that the party or attorney has read the pleading, motion, or legal memorandum, and that to the best of the party's or attorney's knowledge, information, and belief, formed after an inquiry reasonable under the circumstances: (1) it is well grounded in fact; (2) is warranted by existing law or a good faith argument for the extension, modification, or reversal of existing law or the establishment of new law; (3) it is not interposed for any improper purpose...; and (4) the denials of factual contentions are warranted on the evidence or, if specifically so identified, are reasonably based on a lack of information or belief.

CR 11(a)(4) further provides that:

a pleading, motion, or legal memorandum is signed in violation of this rule, the court, upon motion or upon its own initiative, may impose upon the person who signed it, a represented party, or both, an appropriate sanction, which may include an order to pay to the other party or parties the amount of the reasonable expenses incurred because of the filing of the pleading, motion, or legal memorandum, including a reasonable attorney fee.

Thus, CR 11 sanctions apply to "baseless filings" which are filings not supported by the facts or existing law. *Bryant v. Joseph Tree, Inc.*, 119 Wn.2d 210, 219, 829 P.2d 1099 (1992).

As explained above, none of the arguments the petitioner makes in favor of her Motion are supported by the facts or the law. In fact, the petitioner's Motion demonstrates not only a

misunderstanding of the court's April 7, 2017 Order but also a fundamental misunderstanding of the UCCJEA. For example, the petitioner argues based on UCCJEA provisions which do not apply to this matter; the petitioner directs this court to wrest jurisdiction from Illinois, which this court cannot do; the petitioner claims that the respondent should be punished for periods of time when the petitioner concealed the child from the court, law enforcement, and the respondent. These are just a few of the more glaring examples of the baseless nature of the petitioner's Motion.

Because the petitioner's Motion was filed in violation of CR11, the respondent is requesting his attorney's fees for having to defend against this Motion. The respondent is requesting that the petitioner and her counsel be made jointly and severally liable for this attorney's fee award.

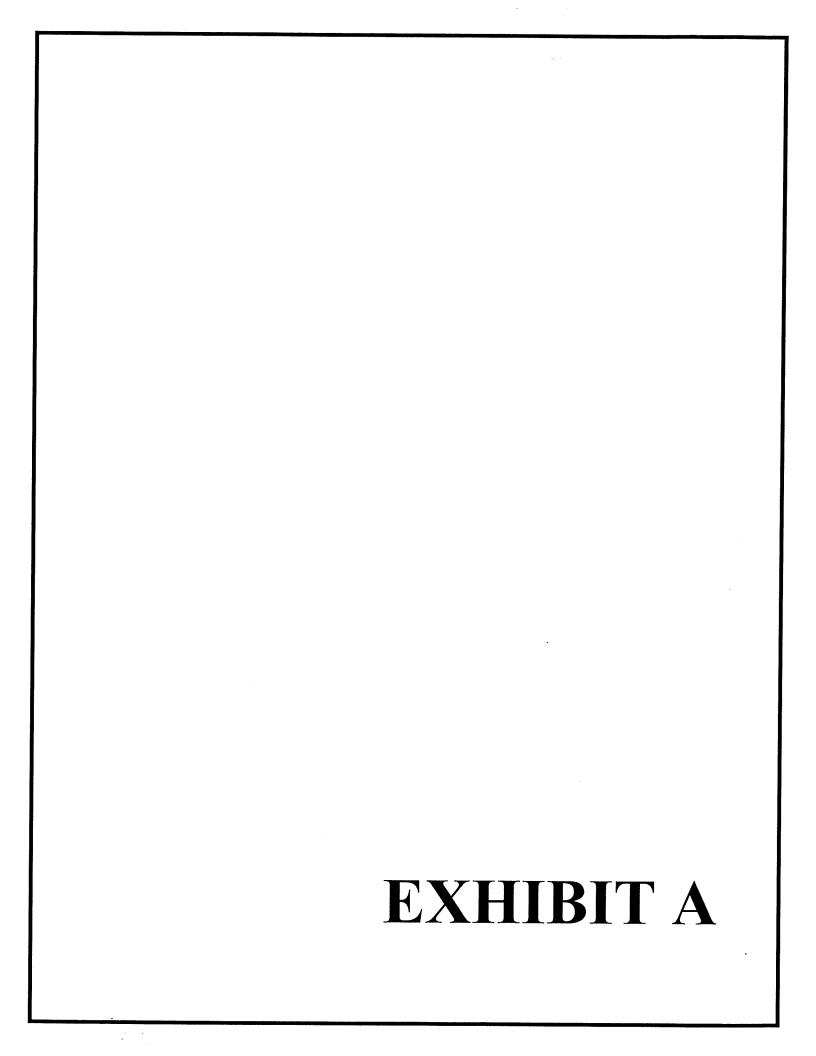
Proof of the respondent's counsel notifying the petitioner's counsel of her intent to seek CR 11 sanctions is attached hereto as *Exhibit C*.

Respectfully submitted this 26<sup>th</sup> day of April, 2017.

I certify this memorandum contains 4,194 words, in compliance with Local Civil Rules.

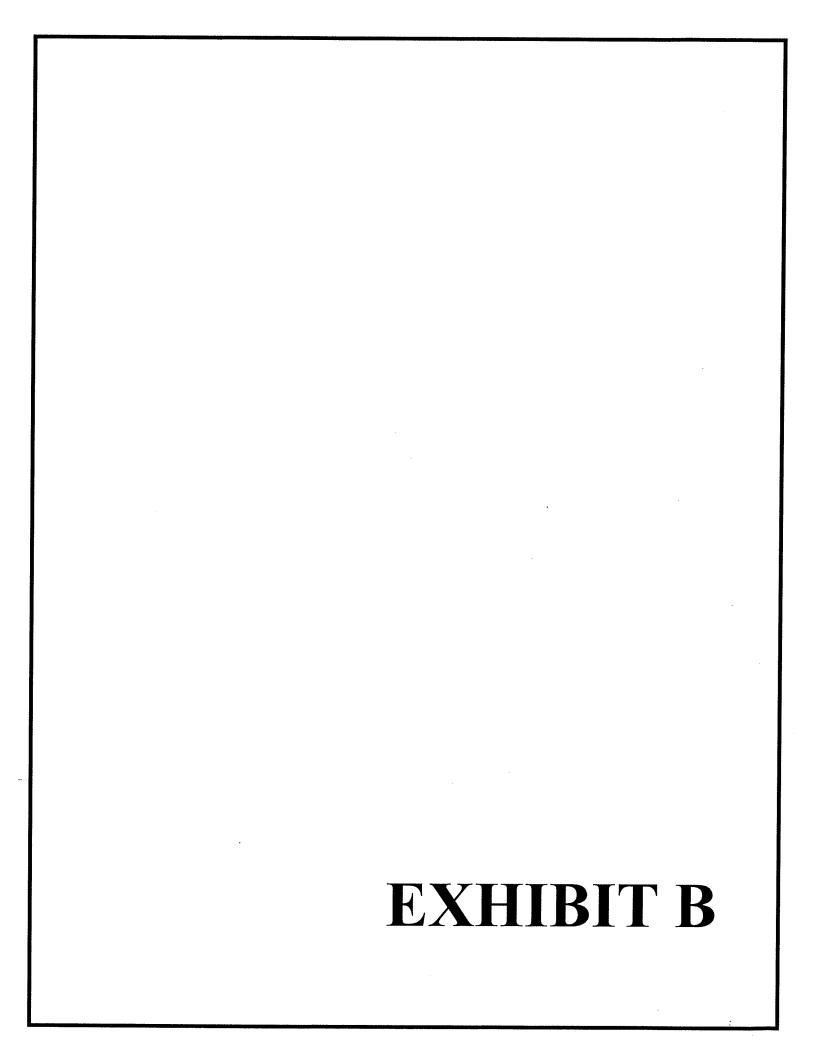
Natalie Roberts/ WSBA No. 42250
Attorney for Respondent

Attorney for Respondent

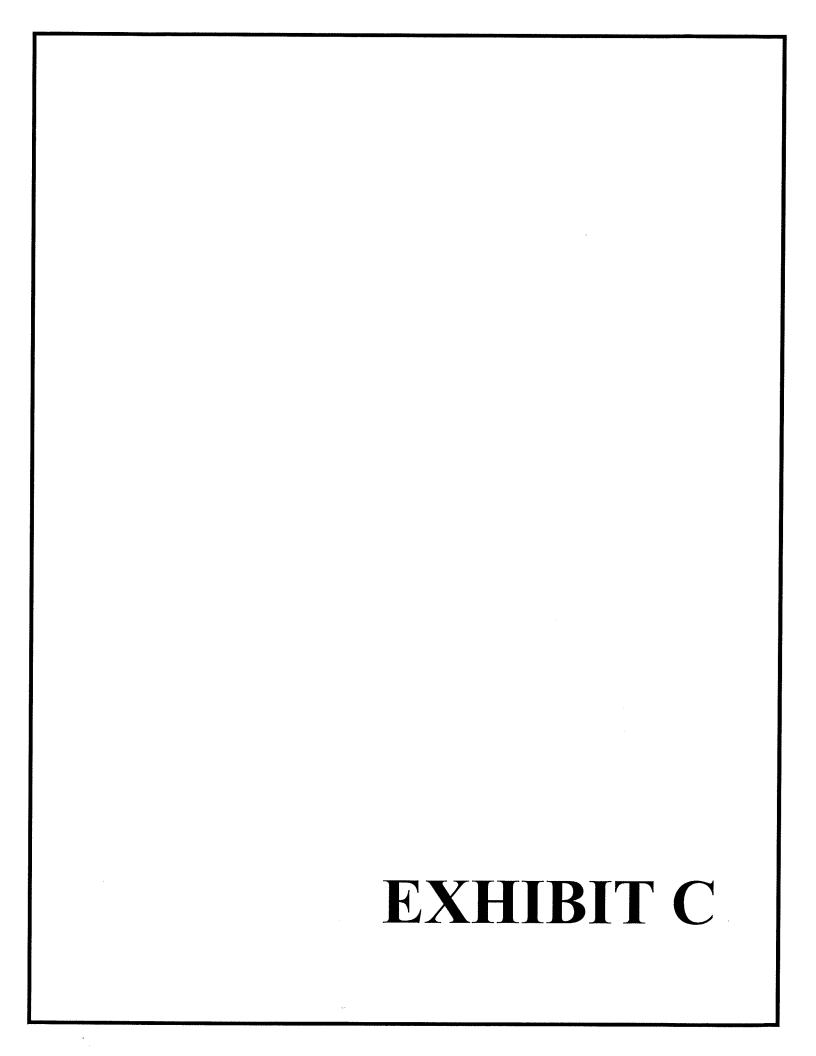


HECOMO OMBUNDAD

WHEATON, ILLINOIS 60187-0707



ORDER - BLANK			4/0		2116 /Pa	w 6i19
STATE OF ILLINOIS	U	NITED STATES	OF AMERICA		2116 (Re	
30 114.	THE CIRCUIT COU	RT OF THE EIG	IDUL HTMBBTHE	CIAL CIRCUIT	Tookii of born	1135
Providing 1: Michael In	ATT &	_ <del></del>	-143 E NUMBER			, , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , ,
anchage Gro	25-5-4	(	DRDER		File Stamp Here	1-100000
This com-		•				-
This cause coming before subject matter, IT IS H	ore the Court; the Co EREBY ORDERS	ourt being fally	advised in the pre	mises, and hav	ing jurisdiction of the	ne
On Respondents Sand July South Sis Share A paydolo House of a	the fre	of wit	the As	2. 0. 0. 4. C.	Polyhin	2
in trevientes	designation	Set of	rental for 5/2	Legeth LIT w	Aufersi Hairs	300
Petaleone's res	tion to E	ptend p in open	Cocent.	clu of p	rote tum	
Name: DuPage Attorney Number Attorney for: DuPage Attorney Number Attorney Number Attorney Number Attorney for: DuPage Attorney Number Attorney Number Attorney Number Attorney Number Attorney Number Attorney Number Attorney for: DuPage Attorney Number Attorney for: DuPage Attorney Number Attorney for: DuPage Attorney for: DuPage Attorney Number Attorney for: DuPage Attorney for: DuPag	1: 178538 U. Jent 20 1 IL 60		ENTER:  Julia  Date: 4/2	Judge Judge		



#### **Natalie Roberts**

From:

Monica Chin <mchin@nw-familylaw.com>

Sent:

Friday, April 21, 2017 3:41 PM

To:

Natalie Roberts

Subject:

Re: In re Watts and Gantine Reconsideration

Great Natalie. May God help this child. This is all so wrong, and justice will eventually prevail.

Monica Chin Attorney at Law 206.467.8000 mchin@nw-familylaw.com

On Apr 21, 2017, at 3:35 PM, Natalie Roberts <a href="mailto:rroberts@goldbergjones.com">rroberts@goldbergjones.com</a> wrote:

Monica,

I want to put you on notice that we will be seeking CR 11 sanctions against you and your client for your Motion for Reconsideration.

Natalie Roberts Attorney

<image001.png>

1200 Westlake Ave. N., #700 Seattle, WA 98109 206-448-1010 206 448-0736 (fax) Visit our Website at www.GoldbergJones-Wa.com

Confidentiality Notice: This message is sent by a law firm and may contain information that is privileged or confidential. If you received this transmission in error, please notify the sender by reply e-mail and delete the message and any attachments.