

From: [Gina Turcotte <goddessgina@verizon.net>](mailto:Gina.Turcotte@goddessgina@verizon.net)  
To: ['SenLibby.Mitchell@legislature.maine.gov'](mailto:SenLibby.Mitchell@legislature.maine.gov)  
Date: 2/8/2006 2:07:20 PM  
Subject: Follow up to your conversation with Gina Turcotte



Dear Libby,

Pasted below is the content of the letter I hand delivered today to Commissioner Harvey, Director Beougher of Child and Family Services and Director Despard of the Division of Policy and Special Requests. Also pasted below is the content of a letter my daughter Jenna wrote on my behalf stating her opinion about this situation.

I hope you have been able to make some progress in this regard as this is a serious and urgent matter which is negatively affecting my life and my ability to care for myself and my daughter once again. I understand navigating through red tape can be an exhausting and frustrating experience; however, I hope that we will be able to illuminate for those interested parties the urgency of this matter and will be able to find a workable resolution to this dilemma.

Thank you for your time, interest and diligence in helping me to resolve this problem.

Respectfully,

Gina L. Turcotte

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February 8, 2006

Brenda Harvey, Commissioner  
Department of Health and Human Services  
221 State Street  
Augusta, Maine 04330

James Beougher, Director  
Office of Child and Family Services  
Department of Health and Human Services  
221 State Street  
Augusta, Maine 04330

Dan Despard, Director  
Division of Policy and Special Requests  
Bureau of Child and Family Services  
Department of Human Services  
221 State St.  
Augusta, ME 04333

RE: AUG-PC-02-015  
Jenna Turcotte  
Opened April 26, 2002  
Dismissed July 1, 2004  
Closed July 31, 2004

Thank you for your attention to this letter, Commissioner Harvey, Director Beougher and Director Despard, as you will discover that the objective of this letter is of an urgent nature. Specifically, I am encountering some seriously damaging consequences as a result of the above-referenced case, although my full parental rights were returned to me on July 1, 2004; my relationship with my daughter is now healthy and strong, and I continue to evolve and grow emotionally, physically, and spiritually.

Interestingly, at the court hearing on July 1, 2004 when custody was returned to me, all parties (DHS, Guardian Ad Litem, Judge French et al) made comments on the record about how impressed they were by my diligence in resolving my mental health issues in order to regain custody of my daughter and to create a healthier and happier life for us.

I will try to keep this letter as brief and concise as I am able; however, the explanation for this request is a bit complex so your full attention and consideration would be greatly appreciated.

On/about April 26, 2002 DHHS obtained legal custody of my daughter, then 14 years old, for 2 primary reasons. 1) I was suffering from negative symptoms of improperly managed Bipolar Disorder and was unable to properly care for my self or my daughter, and 2) due to my lack of good judgment because of my illness, I compelled my daughter to live with me and my then-fiancé' although my relationship with this man was of an emotionally violent nature. However, there were no allegations, nor substantiations, of physical abuse by either myself or my fiancé against my daughter.

My daughter was placed in my mother's physical custody on April 26, 2002 at which time I became more focused on becoming healthy and strong. I sought out better medical care as well as continued counseling from Suzanne White, LCSW, who I was referred to by DHHS. I still attend regular weekly counseling sessions with Ms. White and have established a solid professional relationship with her that I expect will continue for quite some time. I also have been effectively medicated since late 2002.

I was classified as totally and permanently disabled by the Social Security Administration in 2003 which persisted until mid-2004 when I finally returned to work full-time. Also, I returned to college in the Fall 2003 semester at UMA and have been able to maintain a 3.0+ GPA since my return to school. I am currently enrolled in the Bachelors Degree for Mental Health and Human Services program as a 2<sup>nd</sup> year Junior with an expected graduation date of 2007-2008.

I was able to create a solid professional relationship with Ms. White and through that relationship I made great strides regarding my relationship with myself, my daughter and my fiancé. My fiancé and I also attended joint counseling sessions which eventually illuminated the fact that our relationship was unhealthy for both of us. We reciprocally ended our relationship in June, 2005. He and I

agreed that our top priority was to show each other mutual respect, empathy and unconditional love, above all else. He and I engaged in innumerable conversations about the unhealthy, destructive and disrespectful nature of our relationship, how it was affecting each of us, and how our relationship was not serving the needs that we each harbored.

Our highest priority during the process of our separation was to maintain our integrity and level of honor. We accepted that we had both made poor choices during our relationship. Although those choices resulted in negative experiences those experiences helped us to create a stronger sense of Self and the recognition that we loved each other beyond comprehension. But it was because of this love for each other that we recognized that we needed to not be together in an exclusive and committed partnership. This scenario is just a tidbit of information about the growth both he and I achieved as a result of my losing custody of my daughter.

Because of my spiritual growth, my education, my life experiences and my personal crusade for spiritual accomplishment and evolvement, I applied, and was hired, for a Direct Care Counselor position with NFI North, Inc in September, 2004. During the application process, I divulged to NFI that there was a DHS/CPS case against me regarding the care of my daughter. NFI investigated this information and offered me employment regardless of the existence of this case.

My job was based in a locked residential mental health facility in Sidney, Maine working with troubled and violent children ages 9 – 13. During my 16 months with NFI I also worked in a secure residential facility in Stetson, Maine which served troubled and violent children ages 14 – 17. I was employed by this agency from Sept. 2004 through Dec. 2005. (I left my position because of declining corporate morale) I can proudly say that I had a significant impact on not only the children in Sidney but also on the children at the Stetson program. I felt confident, valuable and successful in my relationships, counseling abilities and effectiveness with the clients, regardless of their specific needs.

I conscientiously utilized my formal education, my strength of character, my depth of spirit, my life experiences and my idealism as effective counseling strategies with my young clients. In November 2005, I was approached by my supervisor and was asked to facilitate a "process group" for our children in Sidney. I found this to be quite an honor considering that I had just returned to full-time work in September 2004 after being totally disabled for over 2 years. Also, my position with NFI was also my first position in the field of Social Work. The only other professional exposure I had with troubled children was in 1999 when I served as a voluntary Guardian ad Litem for 6 months through the CASA program.

I cannot say, however, that my employment with NFI was an easy adventure; it was THE most difficult and personally challenging occupation I ever engaged in. This job compelled me to look inside my Self, be honest with my Self about Who I Was and Who I Wanted to Be and discover the most positive and effective strategies to achieve my goals. The most effective counseling skill one can have with people is the ability and willingness to be authentic. (However, this does not mean divulging personal information to clients) Naturally, I was challenged to turbo-boost my personal growth because I was determined to make a positive difference in the lives of every person who entered my life, regardless of my relationship with them. This was my absolute focus throughout my entire period of employment with NFI.

To my surprise, when the children at Sidney learned of my departure from the program I was told that each of them cried when they were first told. I was also told that they were so upset by my leaving that staff members celebrated my birthday with (for) the children to help them to feel better. (My birthday was the previous week) In the 16 months I worked at this program, I witnessed a significant staff turnover which never evoked a community response such as this one.

Since leaving NFI in December 2005, I have been seeking employment in this occupational field as an in-home based counselor for children. I have recently encountered a legal obstacle that prevents me from being employed as an in-home support professional. The DHHS regulation states that any person who has ever had a "substantiated" Child Protective case is permanently excluded from holding an in-home support position working with children. I have been told that this regulation is upheld regardless of the final outcome of the case. I surmise that this regulation exists because being an in-home support professional requires one to perform their duties without immediate and constant supervision or direct support from peers.

I am disheartened that this regulation does not appear to allow for exceptions for people who have taken charge of their lives and have created positive and lasting changes. More often than not it is people such as me who are the most qualified, most empathetic and most compassionate to the multitude of clients needing mental health services. But we are excluded because of our temporary life circumstances.

I am an exception to that rule.

Throughout the last 5 years, I have learned a great deal about Who I Was, Who I Am, Who I Want to Be, where I am going in my life, and how I want to get there. I have strengthened my personal boundaries, secured healthy and effective coping skills, maintained a long-term relationship with a competent and caring medical doctor, secured a long-term relationship with a competent therapist, sought out spiritual evolvement through many spiritual avenues and have created long-term life goals for my self and my relationship with my daughter.

My relationship with my daughter is now beyond reproach. I have established a home environment that encourages win-win conflict resolution and mutually respectful relationships. She is encouraged to speak with me about any type of conflict she may have regardless of the nature of that conflict. She appears to now be comfortable speaking with me about all the provocative adolescent issues – drugs, alcohol, sex, dating, integrity, popularity and her relationship with me. She continues to impress me with her ever-evolving sense of responsibility, integrity and honor with regard to her relationships with her self, me, her family, her friends and other peers.

She continues to review her past choices, recognize how some of those choices did not yield her the results she was seeking, explore new ways of determining what is right for her life, and asking for help when she feels she needs it. I have encouraged her to confront me on issues that don't seem comfortable for her and I always strive to be an active listener even if the information I'm being offered is uncomfortable for me. Because my daughter and I are very similar strong women, we often disagree on important life issues. However, she and I are now able to have a controlled, respectful and transparent conversation about all the options that are available in that situation. I have attached to this letter a letter that she has written stating her opinions about her experiences over the last 5 years. I encourage you to take the time to read it.

The purpose for this letter is to ask that you adjudicate/declare my DHS/CPS case as "waived" or "forgiven", or whatever other word would be more appropriate, so I can continue to affect the lives of those people who need to experience my loving energy. I want to create a life-long career helping people, specifically children, but I cannot achieve this goal in the manner that I desire because my case with DHS/CPS is going to forever be an insurmountable obstacle... unless you can help me...

Would you consider placing a letter in my DHS/CPS case file stating that I am not governed by that regulatory restriction? Possibly also stating that I am cleared to work with children in whatever capacity I am professionally qualified notwithstanding my previous history with Child Protective Services. In order to help you make this decision I am willing to authorize all of my personal support professionals to speak with you regarding my current health and appropriateness to work in this field with these types of clients.

Unfortunately, until this situation is officially resolved my ability to work in this field has been significantly hindered. I am currently unemployed and diligently seeking employment in the helping professions. However, I have an opportunity for a job from an agency in

Waterville but they cannot extend the offer because of my case with DHS/CPS. They have told me that if I can resolve this issue they would be excited to bring me onboard. Can you help me??

I have contacted Senator Elizabeth Mitchell requesting her help in this regard and will forward a copy of this letter to her as well. My expectation is that my request will be assigned a high priority for a number of reasons: 1) the children needing mental health services need me to be in this field... I am very good at what I do and to prevent me from working with them is a significant disservice to them and their needs, 2) I am currently unemployed and most of the employment positions available are in-home support positions which I am apparently not qualified to hold, 3) I have worked very hard at creating a positive life for myself and to have this negative experience thwart my ability to help my fellow humans is a gross injustice, 4) because I am currently unemployed with limited employment options my need for DHS financial assistance continues to increase with each passing day. This occurrence would be counterproductive for all parties involved: DHS, mental health clients, my daughter and myself.

My contact information is listed below. I would appreciate an immediate response to my letter, even if you are simply contacting me to say that you cannot help. I would appreciate any help that you may be able and willing to offer me.

*Gina L. Turcotte* Respectfully submitted,

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My name is Jenna Turcotte and I am the daughter of Gina Turcotte. I know I am by no means as articulate as my mother, but nevertheless she has requested I write this letter giving my view of the past few years, and, more importantly, of right now.

I am 18 years old and I was 14 when I was taken away by DHHS. Actually, I myself encouraged my guidance counselor to seek out help for me. That is the first indication of my mother's strength and good influence, even though quite obscure. She has raised me since I was born to know how to take care of myself, to know instinctively when my environment isn't the best for me. So it was through her teachings, and her guidance that I had the strength to ask for help in the first place.

I will admit that if she was still the person she was three years ago, then I would not recommend her for the field of work she is currently seeking, but my mother has overcome a great many obstacles to become the amazing person she is today. Quite honestly I don't think it would do any good to delve into what happened while my mother was sick and while I was still in DHHS custody because we would be talking about a different person altogether and it is now my mother who is the topic of this letter, not that other person. It has taken my mother a great deal of personal and spiritual growth to get where she is today and it is very unfortunate that she still has so many obstacles to overcome. I find it ridiculous that the DHHS case to be held against her, especially since she did in fact win back custody of me and that would not have happened without my full consent.

Take a moment to think about the job itself. In home support to prevent children from progressing to a state where they need to be sent to an institution such as NFI, where my mother was previously employed for 16 months. What is it exactly that these children need? Guidance. Is there any better person to guide a child through a strenuous period of personal, than a person who has been in a similar position and overcome it herself. A person who has seen what can happen if these children are not attended to. A person who helped many, many children, who have already been institutionalized, get their life back on track, and help them step by step to work their way back into society. I do not believe that any person who has not dealt with what my mother has dealt with will have the qualifications necessary to provide the care required.

As far as my mother as a person, words can't even begin to describe her. I currently live with my mother, actually, and, in spite of the past, we have no difficulties in sharing our space. She is kind and considerate to me and helps me with whatever it is I may need. My mother is a very good friend of mine. She is a person I can always talk to, even about things I am too anxious about to discuss with my close friends. I believe my mother would be able to help any child as much as she has helped me. If it weren't for my mother, I would not be the caring, compassionate, gentle, and considerate human being I am today. Barring my mother from working in this particular field is pure folly in my opinion. To me, that's just several more children being allowed to work their way out of healthy society. Please take into consideration, not my mother's past, but her future. Think of all the good she could do for the troubled children of Maine. Isn't that at least worth it? If not then think of all the things this incredible woman has done to better herself and the world around her. She deserves a chance to prove what an asset she is and I believe you would be remiss to deny her this opportunity.

I would like to thank you very much for taking the time to read my letter and I hope you will put a great deal of thought into your final decision.

Jenna Lyn Turcotte