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Betsy Butler

April 6, 2021

The Honorable Thomas Umberg
Chair, Senate Judiciary Committee
State Capitol, Room 2187
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Senate Bill 654 (Min) – Support

Dear Senator Umberg,

On behalf of the California Women's Law Center, we write in support of SB 654 which will help protect children in family court custody or visitation proceedings.

California law states that the perpetration of child abuse or domestic violence in a household where a child resides is detrimental to that child's health, safety and welfare, and requires courts to consider any history of abuse or habitual drug use in determining custody. However, the same does not apply to visitation. An unsupervised visitation can mean a child is alone with an abusive or drug-addicted parent for days.

SB 654 requires the court to consider the history of abuse or continual illegal use of controlled substances by a parent when deciding whether to award unsupervised visitation and mandates a court that institutes visitation orders under these circumstances must state its reasons supporting the order on the record.

This bill also clarifies that a child whose custody or visitation is at issue in family court can inform a court professional that they have changed their decision about addressing the court, compelling the court professional to communicate the child's preference as soon as possible. This will ensure the child's voice is heard.

CWLC's mission is to create a more just and equitable society by breaking down barriers and advancing the potential of women and girls through transformative litigation, policy advocacy, and education. We prioritize the health and safety of all children, especially those who are the most vulnerable or experiencing abuse in their home.

For these reasons, the California Women's Law Center supports SB 654.

Sincerely,



Betsy Butler
Executive Director