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My name is Ana Ionescu and I am a student at Tulane University. I am currently 19 years old, but my experience with the New Jersey family court system and this so-called 'Parent Alienation Syndrome' has affected me since age 10. It all started with my parents' divorce in 2009 which did not come as much of a shock to me. In fact, I was quite relieved to hear that I did not have to live under the same roof as my mother every single day. My mother and I were never super close but when my parents separated I started to sense a change in her attitude towards me and our relationship. She began to be more aggressive and a lot of the things she would say to be had a spiteful undertone. Now looking back, it was probably because she was angry that I preferred spending time with my father than with her. However, the way she treated me for months and months prior to the December 2011 trial decision was no rationalization for her feelings. Her maltreatment started off subtly by criticizing my weight and calling me fat when I simply wasn't, but she forced me to go to a nutritionist to 'help me maintain a healthier lifestyle.' Then it escalated to a physical altercation in which she basically choked me on my bed when I was 10 years old. I was checking my phone before bed and she decided that I was not allowed to, so she leaped on my bed and proceeded to place her arm on my neck to push me away and reach with her other arm for my phone which was in my hand. In doing so, I was not able to breathe for a couple seconds and couldn't stop coughing for a couple minutes afterwards. This was a side of her that I had never seen before and never wanted to see or be around again. For the next couple of weeks leading up to the trial decision, she made it a point to scream and yell at me almost every day, telling me how my father is brainwashing me and that he is just using me to get back at her. She would also call me horrible things like 'my dad's puppet' and 'manipulative' and saying that 'God will punish me for all my lies' and that 'no one will believe me so it is better to not to speak up at all.' I remember realizing that this divorce could be a blessing in disguise because I could now choose to live with my loving and caring father, as opposed to my mean-spirited and increasingly abusive mother, but needless to say that dream remained just that: a dream.

Not only did the court give my mom sole custody, after I had revealed to them everything she had done to me and how scared I was at just the thought of her having full custody, but the court also forced us to attend Family Bridges. This program highlighted all the corruption that had been going on in the courts and all the corruption that will continue to destroy any chance at a normal childhood for me. The judge had 2 police escorts take my brother and I directly from the court house to the airport to make sure we went on the flight to San Francisco where Family Bridges took place. I obviously did not want to be there and kept reiterating to the people there (Richard Warshak, Randy Rand and I think Randy's wife) the fact that PAS does not apply to us and they kept telling us that we have it and that's why we came here. I figured this 'program' would only be a couple of days because our winter break was over in a couple of days and we would have to go back to school, but I'll never forget when they basically told us that if we don't tell them what they want to hear we are not leaving, and if that means missing school then so be it. From that point on, I realized the only way out of that psychological torture was to 'fake it till we make it' and so we started playing along with their theories and agreed with everything they

said and acted exactly the way they wanted us to act, while counting down the days until we would be freed in our heads. Everyday we would go into this hotel conference room and they would show us all these stories and situations of other families affected by PAS (all of them coincidentally having the alienated parent be the mom and the dad was the alienator) and we would discuss ways in which our mother and I could rebuild and strengthen our relationship. Yet every time I would mention her horrible maltreatment towards me, they would respond by saying that my father made those lies up and brainwashed me into believing that they were true. Experiencing this all day every day for several days, it was no surprise that I cried myself to sleep for more nights than I can remember. The overall tone every time they used when speaking to me was so condescending and degrading that it was truly a struggle to keep the reality of the matter in my mind and not fall into their web of lies. I didn't know I had the emotional strength I did until that very week, but without that resilience there was no way I would have been able to survive the nightmare that was the next 3 years without my father.

While this experience has clearly had its negative effects on my childhood and upbringing, I was one of the few that was able to find a silver-lining in all of this mess. The corruption I experienced firsthand after having gone through the family court systems has inspired me to pursue a career in family law, specifically with the hopes of representing children in cases similar to mine. No child should ever experience the abuse, mental torture and pain that I felt as a result of these false 'reunification programs' endorsed by the crooked courts, and so I strive to be a voice for all the innocent children that are dragged into their parents' divorce and even worse, into the family courts all across America. Therefore, I hope my statement now will provide another lens with which everyone can look through to recognize the apparent injustices of the family courts and the change that needs to occur within the judicial system of our nation.