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November 2, 2005

Pat Mitchell  
President & Chief Executive Officer  
Public Broadcasting Service  
1320 Braddock Place  
Alexandria, VA 22314

Dear Ms. Mitchell:

PBS at one time enjoyed a well-deserved reputation for accurate and high-quality documentary programming. It is therefore not only sad but shocking to see a respected media outlet lower itself and journalistic standards with "Breaking the Silence: Children's Stories."

This spectacle is not disinterested journalism but closer to ideologically driven propaganda. To disseminate falsehoods against American citizens who have no platform to speak in their own defense is, frankly, beyond belief. Despite vilifying these fathers, no hard evidence is ever presented to prove the crimes of which they are accused on national television. Using the mass media to target defenseless groups and divide children from their parents is a practice familiar from the most hideous of dictatorial regimes. At a time when the American media is already on the defensive over questionable ethics, PBS, far from restoring the public's faith in journalistic integrity, has descended further into the depths of irresponsible journalism.

Beyond the personal attacks are the larger untruths throughout the film. There is no scientific basis for any of the major assertions in this film. For example:

***"All over America, battered mothers are losing custody of their children."***

***"One third of mothers lose custody to abusive husbands."***

No evidence is cited for these statements, and they are not true. Though parents of both genders do lose custody unjustly, it is overwhelmingly fathers, not mothers, who are routinely stripped of custody of their children with no finding of wrongdoing:

- A study published in the peer-reviewed journal *Future of Children* estimated that 85-90% of custody awards go to mothers.
- “Although patterns may vary from state to state,” concludes a study from the New York University School of Law, “it appears that, over all, mothers obtain sole physical custody ten times more often than fathers.”
- A study in Arlington, Virginia, found that over an eighteen-month period maternal custody was awarded in 100% of decisions.
- A study of four states, published in the *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, found a clear preference among judges for maternal custody.
- Sanford Braver of Arizona State University surveyed litigants: “Not a single father thought that the system favored them in the slightest, and three-fourths thought it favored mothers,” he concluded. “And mothers tended to agree that the system was slanted in their favor.”

Had PBS done a thorough and balanced investigation of the family courts, rather than resorting to gender invective, they would have discovered the larger problem of systemic corruption that deprives children of both mothers and fathers and sometimes both.

***“Batterers are twice as likely to contest as non-batterers. And they often win sole or joint custody.”***

***“75% of cases in which fathers contest custody, fathers have history of being batterers.”***

Again, no evidence is cited, and no such evidence exists. Fathers are *not* the exclusive or even the main perpetrators of domestic violence. Again, a balanced and thorough treatment would have found that both genders are responsible for domestic violence:

- Martin S. Fiebert has compiled a bibliography of studies published in the peer-reviewed journal, *Sexuality and Culture* that demonstrate that women are as physically aggressive against their partners as men.
- Recent studies include those by John Archer and Murray Straus.
- According to *Mother Jones* magazine: “Women report using violence in their relationships more often than men.”
- “Women are doing the battering,” writes feminist Betty Friedan, “as much or more than men.”
- Philip W. Cook has documented this extensively in *Abused Men: The Hidden Side of Domestic Violence*.

***“Children are “most often in danger from the father.”***

This may be the most provocative and irresponsible statement of all. Yet again, no evidence is presented, and in this case the precise opposite is true. The vast preponderance of child abuse is committed by single mothers, not fathers. A father’s presence reduces child abuse:

- The Department of Health and Human Services found that women aged twenty to forty-nine are almost twice as likely as men to be perpetrators of child maltreatment: “Almost two-thirds were females,” their report states. Most male perpetrators were not fathers.
- The Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect from the Department of Health and Human Services found that “women (the majority of whom are natural mothers) murder children 31.6 times more often than do natural fathers.”

- “Contrary to public perception,” write researchers Patrick Fagan and Dorothy Hanks of the Heritage Foundation, “research shows that the most likely physical abuser of a young child will be that child’s mother, not a male in the household.”
- A study published by London’s Family Education Trust found children are up to 33 times more likely to be abused in a single-mother home than in a home with a father present.
- “The presence of the father...placed the child at lesser risk for child sexual abuse,” a study in the refereed journal *Adolescent and Family Health* concluded. “The protective effect from the father’s presence in most households was sufficiently strong to offset the risk incurred by the few paternal perpetrators.”

***“Parental Alienation Syndrome (PAS)...has been used in countless cases by abusive fathers to gain custody of their children.”***

***“PAS continues to be used in family courts as a defense for why a child is rejecting the father.”***

***PAS “has been thoroughly debunked by the American Psychological Association.”***

No compilation of cases suggests either that fathers invoking PAS are “abusive” or that such a defense is especially effective in court. Yet whatever we call it, children are systematically taught to hate their parents (most often, though not exclusively, fathers) and used as informers against them with the backing of the courts. The systematic, government-backed turning of children against their parents is another practice familiar from the bureaucratic dictatorships of the last century. If “Breaking the Silence” had tried to do an honest investigation of PAS, it would have informed viewers that:

- The Association of Women Psychiatrists (a professional group unaffiliated with the APA) takes PAS seriously enough that their Fall 2003 newsletter printed an article asserting “The Denial and/or Discrediting of the Parental Alienation Syndrome Harms Women.”
- A longitudinal study by Stanley S. Clawar and Brynne Valerie Rivlin, published by the American Bar Association in 2003, followed 700 “high conflict” divorce case over a 12-year period and found that elements of PAS were present in the vast majority of the cases studied.
- Rhea Farberman, Executive Director of Public and Member Communications of the APA says, “The American Psychological Association does not have an official position on parental alienation syndrome (PAS) -- pro or con. The Connecticut Public Television press release (Breaking the Silence) is incorrect.”

Inflammatory language also characterizes your promotional literature:

***“One of the most effective ways an abusive father can inflict pain and declare his domination is to take custody of his children away from their mother.”***

***“To win custody of the kids over and against the mother’s will is the ultimate victory...short of killing the kids.”***

In divorce cases involving children, it is the mother who files for divorce in 67-91% of cases. So in effect it is mothers who are inflicting pain and declaring “domination” by taking custody away from fathers. As for “killing the kids,” as noted above, most child murders are committed by mothers. Sensational cases such as Susan Smith and Andrea Yates reflect, unfortunately, a statistical reality.

The show also contains internal inconsistencies and sleights-of-hand. An attorney claims, again without evidence, that many cases of abuse by fathers go unreported. This amounts to a presumption of guilt. This attorney has no way of knowing that these citizens are guilty of crimes in the absence of a jury trial, without which, under our constitutional system, they must be presumed innocent.

No dissenting opinion is heard anywhere in the film. Your producers contacted ACFC, SAFE-NH, and others to create a fair and balanced account. But at some point a decision seems to have been made not to produce a fair and balanced account.

We also question the aim of airing this broadcast now. Only two years ago, PBS presented a similar 7-hour blitz entitled “Domestic Violence.” That work also distorted the truth, attacked the innocent with no right of reply, and made no attempt to understand the background, but it was not nearly as poisonous as this one. Such saturation coverage indicates that PBS is aiming not to understand a social problem but to use sensational propaganda to push a political agenda.

Political propaganda, let alone hate-mongering, has no place in taxpayer-funded media. The United States Information Agency and other broadcast outlets are precluded by law from disseminating propaganda within the United States. And the charter of PBS prohibits it. At a time when PBS is already accused of political bias, this production leads more Americans to question the propriety of government-funded mass media.

At this point we believe that simple inaction will not suffice. Either the accusations in this film are true or they are not. If large numbers of proven criminals are physically assaulting women and molesting children why are these men not being arrested, tried before a jury, convicted, and sentenced to prison terms? On the other hand, if evidence does not exist to arrest and convict these men, why are wild and unsubstantiated accusations being leveled against them in the mass media? And why is there less concern that proven criminals are at large than that they are retaining custody of their own children? The obsession with child custody in “Breaking the Silence” is an open admission that the hysteria over domestic “violence” is being fanned not to apprehend criminals but to further disadvantage fathers in custody cases.

In light of these questions, we appeal to PBS to seriously reconsider whether it is appropriate to continue to air this one-sided film without proper balance or opposing viewpoints.

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But we want to do more than protest the distortions of this film. Equally grave is that **PBS has missed a valuable opportunity to investigate and understand a larger and very real social ill.** It appears we can agree that serious abuses are indeed taking place in family courts throughout America, resulting in a massive social disaster. If PBS could discard its ideological blinders, reflected in the insistence that only mothers are victims of courts that routinely seize children from both mothers and fathers, PBS could be

conducting a valuable public service. We can provide you with documentary evidence of **systematic and serious violations of the most fundamental constitutional provisions and rights**, including almost every article of the Bill of Rights, *against both fathers and mothers*. In particular:

- **The right of parents to supervise the religious, moral, and civil upbringing of their children routinely is abrogated without cause.**
- **Children are routinely separated from parents against whom no charges of wrongdoing are made.**
- **Parents are incarcerated without trial, counsel, or formal charge.**
- **Knowingly false allegations against parents, for which evidence is not presented, are treated as fact, overturning the presumption of innocence, and not punished when demonstrated to be untrue.**
- **Government agents enter the homes, seize the property, and examine the private papers and effects of parents who are suspected of no wrongdoing.**
- **Bureaucratic police are authorized to issue subpoenas and arrest warrants against parents, contrary to due process of law.**
- **Parents are ordered by government officials to separate from and divorce their spouses, on pain of losing their children.**
- **Parents are forced to pay the fees of court officials and private practitioners they have not hired and whose services they have not sought or used, on pain of incarceration.**
- **Parents suspected of no wrongdoing are burdened with punitive and impossible expropriations of their property and income, sometimes at gunpoint, and intentionally reduced to penury.**
- **A campaign of vilification against private American citizens is being sponsored in the mass media by their own government, and our nation's highest political leaders use their offices as platforms to verbally attack private American citizens, who have no right of reply or opportunity to defend themselves.**
- **Increased measures of police and government surveillance over private citizens under the guise of collecting child support.**
- **Children are forcibly removed from the protection of responsible and loving parents and placed in environments where they are in greatly increased danger of physical and sexual abuse.**
- **Children are used as informers against their parents.**
- **Children are instructed with animus against their parents with the backing and even the active participation of government officials.**
- **The creation of forced labor facilities specifically for parents.**
- **Children are used as leverage and as weapons to silence parents who speak out publicly against these abuses.**

- **Official court records, including hearing tapes and transcripts, are doctored and falsified with the knowledge of court officials, and evidence is fabricated against the innocent.**
- **Reports of parents who have been jailed without trial being beaten, in at least one case fatally, and denied medical attention and medication while in police custody.**

Reports of these practices have appeared in reputable national and international publications, including peer-reviewed scholarly journals. Among them: the *Washington Times*, *Washington Post*, *Boston Globe*, *Orlando Sentinel*, *Catholic World Report*, *Crisis*, *Insight*, *Liberty*, *Women's Quarterly*, *World Net Daily*, *Family Policy*, *American Spectator*, *The American Enterprise*, *Human Events*, *Salisbury Review*, *Journal of Law and Family Studies*, *Political Science and Politics*, *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, *Independent Review*, *Society*, and others.

Were PBS to investigate these practices, you would understand why the misinformation in “Breaking the Silence” contributes to, rather than challenges, the abuse of government power. Americans look to the media to be watchdogs of the government, but PBS has allowed itself to become a lapdog.

We are prepared to work with PBS to develop a thorough and balanced investigation of improper, illegal, and unconstitutional practices in America’s family courts and social service agencies. We can supply documentary evidence and direct you to individuals with personal experience of these courts.

We challenge PBS to observe the ethics of its charter and the standards than once made American journalism, including PBS, among the best in the world.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely yours,

*Stephen Baskerville, PhD*  
*President, American Coalition for Fathers and Children*

*Mark Rosenthal, Policy Analyst*  
*R.A.D.A.R. (Respecting Accuracy in Domestic Abuse Reporting)*

*Reena Sommer, PhD*  
*Divorce & Custody Consultant*

*Glenn Sacks*  
*Newspaper Columnist*

*Warren Farrell, PhD*  
*Author, Women Can't Hear What Men Don't Say*

*Jack Kammer*  
*Author, Good Will Toward Men*

*Susan Wolpin*  
*Father & Child Equality, Inc.*

*Gordon E. Finley, PhD*  
*Professor of Psychology, Florida International University*

*Marc Angelucci, President*  
*National Coalition of Free Men, Los Angeles*

*Stephen D. Finstein, LCSW, LMFT, LSOTP*  
*Board Chairman, Fathers For Equal Rights, Inc.*  
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*Steve Cloer, President*  
*Fathers Are Parents Too*

*James Hays, President*  
*Coalition of Fathers and Families New York, Inc.*

*Daniel Lee, President*  
*Child's Best Interest*

*Jim Semerad, Chairman*  
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*John Kral, President*  
*Alabama Coalition for Fathers and Children*

*Jim Loose, Chairman*  
*Parents for Equal Parenting*

*Thomas Golden*  
*Licensed Clinical Social Worker*

*David Buchanan*  
*Author, "Gendercide and Human Rights"*

cc:

Kenneth Y. Tomlinson, Chairman of the Board  
Corporation for Public Broadcasting

Representative Fred Upton, Chair  
Subcommittee on Telecommunications and the Internet, US House of Representatives

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