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Dear Honorable Members of the Utah Legislature,

To The Utah Psychological Association (UPA) has been closely monitoring House Bill 272 during the 2024 Utah legislative session. UPA's Federal Advocacy Coordinator, Dr. Chris Wehl, and the UPA Board express serious concerns regarding this bill.

HB 272 proposes revisions to various aspects of child custody evaluations and is currently progressing through the Utah legislature. If enacted, this bill could have adverse effects. While the bill pledges to enhance the safety of children in families undergoing custody evaluations, it essentially mandates practices already established in Utah Code and AFCC guidelines, such as prioritizing children's safety, evaluating for domestic violence, and incorporating findings into recommendations that safeguard the child. Additionally, the bill suggests exploring training in domestic violence for judicial officers. While these aspects are not opposed, we do not anticipate significant improvements resulting from this bill.

Despite its commendable goal of protecting children, HB 272 harbors detrimental elements that align with an anti-scientific fringe agenda opposing the concept of parental alienation – the notion that one parent can manipulate a child's perception of the other parent.

- The bill effectively prohibits courts from ordering conventional and scientifically supported responses to confirmed cases of parental alienation.
- It restricts the court from considering expert testimony on domestic violence unless provided by individuals with demonstrated expertise and sufficient experience in working with victims of domestic violence or abuse.
- Furthermore, the bill bars the court from adjusting a parent's visitation schedule in response to psychological maltreatment of their child unless physical or sexual abuse is evident.

These problematic provisions heighten the risk of harm to children. Unless these sections are removed, the bill should be opposed.

We strongly urge all psychologists and the public to oppose HB 272 in its current form.

Sincerely,

Tom Mullin, PhD
President, Utah Psychological Association