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Our Public Servants—The Great Heroes of Our Society

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Institutional Self-Protection: No One Wants to Be Responsible, So They Let the Harm to Others Compound Instead

Public-record and research note: This article combines public-policy criticism, personal experience, and published research. Any case-specific allegation remains an allegation unless established by a competent tribunal or disciplinary process. The research cited below identifies population-level associations and risks; it does not claim that every child exposed to family conflict or institutional delay will experience the same outcome.

There is a particular kind of institutional cowardice that thrives inside government.

No one answers.

No one decides.

No one takes ownership.

No one wants their name attached to the response.

The email is forwarded.

The filing is rerouted.

The complaint is summarized into something easier to dismiss.

The urgent issue is placed into the ordinary course.

The ordinary course becomes months.

The months become years.

And because no individual public servant wants to accept responsibility for acting—or for refusing to act—the harm is simply allowed to continue.

Then those harms become **generational consequences for all of society**.

That is not rhetorical exaggeration. Decades of research concerning childhood adversity, prolonged stress, family instability, disrupted relationships, educational harm, mental-health outcomes, and intergenerational transmission have warned that childhood conditions do not remain neatly contained inside childhood.

Institutional Silence Is Not Neutral

An institution may claim that it has not made a decision.

But delay changes the facts while everyone waits.

A temporary arrangement becomes an entrenched status quo.

A relationship that might have been repaired after several weeks becomes more difficult to repair after several months.

A child becomes accustomed to instability, conflict, uncertainty, or the absence of a parent.

The deterioration produced during institutional inaction may later be treated as evidence supporting further inaction.

That is how procedural delay becomes substantive power.

That is how a government system can alter a family without ever honestly acknowledging that it made the decision to do so.

I examined that process directly in [The Weaponization of Time Against Maine's Children](#) and [When Delay Becomes More Permanent Harm](#).

Children do not experience “pending review” as a procedural classification.

They experience time passing.

The Paper Trail Is the Footprint of the Failure

People do not ordinarily spend months assembling timelines, preserving emails, indexing filings, requesting recordings, documenting rejections, identifying witnesses, and reconstructing government processes because paperwork is enjoyable.

The record grows because the failure continues.

The communications multiply because responsibility is fragmented.

The requests continue because the underlying problem remains unresolved.

My article [108,000 Pages Is Not Justice](#) documented what happens when years of unresolved conflict, professional incentives, inaccessible processes, rejected filings, record fragmentation, and repeated nonresponse are permitted to accumulate.

That is what happens, in my view, when predatory business practices and conflict-dependent professional incentives are allowed to continue without effective guardrails.

The enormous record is not the original harm.

It is the measurable footprint of the harm.

Yet institutions often invert cause and effect. The documentation becomes the problem. The volume becomes the problem. The persistence becomes the problem. The person preserving the record becomes the problem.

That inversion is examined more fully in [When Professionals Become More Troubled by Documentation Than by Harm](#).

Childhood Harm Does Not End When the File Is Closed

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention identifies adverse childhood experiences as potentially traumatic childhood events and environmental conditions capable of undermining safety, stability, and bonding. Its examples include violence, abuse, neglect, household substance-use or mental-health problems, incarceration, and instability associated with parental separation. The CDC emphasizes that the list is not exhaustive and that ACEs can affect lifelong health, opportunity, and well-being.

Harvard's Center on the Developing Child explains that excessive or prolonged activation of stress-response systems can disrupt healthy brain and bodily development. Supportive relationships with caring adults can buffer children's stress responses and promote resilience.

That does not mean every disagreement, divorce, separation, or court case inevitably creates toxic stress.

It means prolonged adversity, instability, uncertainty, conflict, or relational disruption should not be treated as harmless merely because it is occurring beneath a court caption.

A government that claims to care about childhood trauma cannot operate systems that unnecessarily extend the conditions capable of producing or worsening it.

Family Conflict Is Not Contained Inside the Family

Research on parental divorce and separation does not support simplistic claims that every child will be harmed or that family structure alone determines a child's future.

The evidence is more precise.

Risk depends substantially on the surrounding conditions: continuing parental conflict, parenting quality, economic disruption, emotional support, stability, and the nature of the child's continuing relationships.

A *World Psychiatry* review explained that parental separation is associated with elevated risks for academic, behavioral, emotional, and substance-related problems while emphasizing that the pathways involve multiple family and social factors.

A separate meta-analysis found that people who experienced parental divorce had higher average risks for several later mental-health outcomes, while also noting that the size of those associations varied and had decreased across more recent study periods. Association is not destiny, but it is enough to establish that prolonged and poorly managed family disruption is not a trivial private inconvenience.

When courts and agencies are already involved, their responsibility should be to reduce avoidable instability—not amplify it through silence, contradictory instructions, administrative fragmentation, inaccessible review, or failure to implement their own orders.

Administrative Burden Is a Form of Government Action

Public institutions often characterize rejected filings, mandatory forms, resubmissions, routing instructions, duplicate notices, unanswered messages, opaque review systems, and repeated proof demands as mere administrative details.

Public-administration researchers describe these obstacles as **administrative burdens**.

Those burdens generally include:

- **Learning costs:** figuring out what the government requires;
- **Compliance costs:** producing documents, meeting procedures, correcting submissions, and repeatedly proving eligibility or entitlement; and
- **Psychological costs:** stress, frustration, stigma, loss of autonomy, and the experience of being treated as suspect or undeserving.

Research describes these burdens as both a source and a consequence of inequality because they affect whether people can actually obtain rights, services, or decisions theoretically available to them.

Inside a child-impact case, that burden does not fall only on the person completing the forms.

Every rejected filing consumes time.

Every unexplained docket entry creates uncertainty.

Every unanswered request produces another request.

Every fragmented procedure forces a parent to spend more time reconstructing the government's work.

The institution externalizes the cost of its dysfunction.

The parent performs the unpaid systems analysis.

The family pays the financial and emotional cost.

The child waits.

That broader interaction between private technology, professional regulation, and institutional self-protection is documented in **The Two-Headed Snake Coin of Maine Justice**.

Conflict Can Become a Business Model

A functioning legal system should reduce conflict, clarify obligations, resolve disputes, and protect children from accumulating adult harm.

But unresolved conflict can also generate revenue.

Every ambiguity may produce another consultation.

Every delayed implementation may produce another motion.

Every accusation may produce a response.

Every response may produce a reply.

Every preventable disagreement may become another billable event.

That does not mean every attorney acts improperly or that every fee is unjustified. Many lawyers perform difficult work honorably.

The structural question is whether the system rewards resolution or rewards continuation.

When professional income grows as family conflict becomes longer, more complicated, and more adversarial, moral exhortation alone is not enough. Strong guardrails, transparent billing, prompt judicial review, neutral fact-finding, meaningful discipline, and enforceable child-impact standards become necessary.

I addressed those incentives more directly in **The Legal Racket: How Family Court Turns Conflict Into Revenue, Leverage, and Institutional Power** and the broader ethics framework in **Beyond the Courtroom**.

The Consequences Can Cross Generations

Children become adults.

Adults form relationships.

They become parents, caregivers, employees, neighbors, voters, patients, and members of communities.

The adaptive behaviors developed during prolonged childhood stress do not automatically disappear because the court case ends.

A 2023 systematic review and meta-analysis found that parents' adverse childhood experiences were associated with mental-health and behavioral difficulties in their children, including internalizing and externalizing problems. The review did not find the same association for every outcome, including cognitive and language skills, which is an important limitation. The evidence supports intergenerational risk—not inevitability.

Positive relationships, treatment, stability, healthy childhood experiences, and competent support can interrupt these pathways.

That is exactly why prompt intervention matters.

The point is not that harm must repeat.

The point is that institutions should stop increasing the risk that it will.

This moral and institutional problem is explored in **Human Nature, Legal Pride, and Generational Harm** and **Follow-Up Petition and Public Notice: Stop Harming Our Children. Period..**

Society Eventually Pays

Childhood adversity is associated at the population level with later mental-health problems, substance misuse, chronic disease, violence exposure, reduced educational opportunity, and diminished employment outcomes.

A 2023 *JAMA Network Open* economic evaluation estimated that health conditions associated with ACEs imposed an annual national burden of approximately **\$14.1 trillion**—about \$183 billion in direct medical spending and the remainder in the estimated value of lost healthy life-years. That figure is a model-based societal estimate, not a claim that \$14.1 trillion appears as direct annual government spending.

The study nevertheless illustrates the scale of the issue.

Society pays through healthcare.

Mental-health treatment.

Substance-use treatment.

School intervention.

Lost educational opportunity.

Reduced workforce participation.

Family instability.

Homelessness.

Justice-system involvement.

Lost productivity.

And another generation of children requiring support because the adults and institutions responsible for prevention preferred self-protection.

The public pays for the original failure.

Then it pays for the consequences.

Then it pays professionals to manage those consequences.

Somehow, the officials whose inaction allowed the problem to compound are rarely required to calculate—or defend—the full cost.

Caring Adults Are Not Expendable

The CDC identifies positive relationships with caring adults as a protective factor. Connecting young people to supportive adults and constructive activities can improve school engagement and establish positive social networks.

That makes prolonged, avoidable disruption of a safe and caring parent-child relationship more than an abstract dispute about adult entitlement.

It is a child-development issue.

A childhood cannot be stayed.

A birthday cannot be remanded.

A school year cannot be reheard.

A damaged relationship cannot always be reconstructed from a later written order.

Time is not merely a court-management variable.

Time is the child's life.

Fragmented Responsibility Is Still Responsibility

Public servants often defend nonaction by explaining that no single person controls the whole process.

That may be true.

It is also the problem.

The clerk routes the filing.

The judge waits for a motion.

The administrator blames the vendor.

The vendor blames court configuration.

The regulator says the conduct belongs in litigation.

The court says professional conduct belongs with the regulator.

The agency says the dispute belongs with the court.

Everyone has a procedure.

Everyone has jurisdictional language.

Everyone has professional distance.

Everyone has a reason not to act.

And the child has another month without relief.

Institutional fragmentation does not erase responsibility.

It distributes responsibility among people who have learned that shared responsibility frequently produces no accountability at all.

What Public Accountability Requires

Accountability does not require every complaint to be granted.

It requires ownership.

A responsible institution should:

1. Identify who has authority to decide.
2. Confirm who received the request.
3. State what evidence was reviewed.
4. Explain the decision honestly.
5. Correct material mistakes promptly.
6. Measure the child impact of delay.
7. Provide enforceable implementation logistics.
8. Preserve a meaningful route for review.
9. Track administrative rework and rejected filings.
10. Hold professionals accountable when incentives or tactics foreseeably deepen child-related harm.

The policy case for binding standards is developed in **“It Has to Be Done This Way”**.

The governing principle is simple:

A right that technically exists but cannot be practically exercised is not meaningful access.

An order that exists on paper but lacks implementation is not meaningful relief.

A complaint process that receives information but does not confront the allegations is not meaningful oversight.

A court system that eventually acts only after developmental time has performed the work of deprivation has not delivered timely justice.

It has documented the aftermath.

Our Great Heroes

Our public servants—the great heroes of our society.

No one wants to be responsible.

No one wants their name attached to the answer.

No one wants to explain why the harm was allowed to continue.

So they protect themselves.

They protect their colleagues.

They protect their procedures.

They protect their institutions.

They protect their professional reputations.

And they let the harm to other people compound instead.

Then the child carries it.

The family carries it.

The next generation carries it.

Eventually, all of society pays for it.

That is the true cost of institutional self-protection.

And as stated in **From the Founding Fathers to a Family-Court Revolution**:

Every seat of power exists on borrowed trust.

That trust is not infinite.

Stop harming our kids.

Research sources

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