

# The Use of Child Protective Services as a Weapon

By Kayla Miranda

One of the scariest things any parent can face is a knock on the door by “Child Protective Services”. Not only is it a personal attack, it’s a threat to the person(s) you love most. The official on the other side of the door has the power to take your child and there’s nothing you can do to stop it. Sure, a judge has to rule on it days later, but the trauma and pain has already occurred. The thought of this makes me want to pack up my family and move to the middle of nowhere in a military style compound that no one can touch. That may be dramatic but the sentiment is real. I will do anything for my children. I will fight any foe, go any distance, tear apart the world itself—if I had to. That’s how most parents feel about their children. The instinct to protect is impossible to ignore.

When someone hears that a parent is being investigated by CPS, you may hear mixed responses. Some feel terrible for the parent because they know the system. Many assume a parent’s guilt saying, “If they were a good parent, CPS wouldn’t have been called” or “If there is nothing to hide then there is nothing to worry about.” The reality is that you have no idea what the case-worker assigned will perceive or how they feel about anything.

As a mother, I have had instances where perfect strangers have commented on my parenting. Toddler meltdowns in stores don’t just attract stares and looks of disapproval, some take it upon themselves to call you a bad parent for not controlling your “wild child”. As your child grows, the number of individuals that feel the need to tell you how to raise your child also grows. Teachers, doctors, family and friends, coaches, troupe leaders—the list is never-ending. The comments that I find most interesting come from people that don’t have children. “If that was my child, they wouldn’t act that way.” And how many children do you have? “None, but I wouldn’t tolerate that!” Well, come see me when you do have children. We’ll talk then.

Everyone’s an expert, and many believe their own style of parenting is best, while yours is lacking. Point is, everyone sees things in their own way. So how do you know that the person sitting in your living room isn’t going to decide that your way of life is not the right way of life?

Child Protective Services is a necessary agency. Unfortunately,

we do live in a world where children are abused. Sometimes, removing a child is a must. But for parents who are not abusing their children, a CPS visit is a nightmare. In conversations with

Westside residents, I was able to gather accounts of some of these instances. One mother changed her religious beliefs as an adult. Once she had a child, her family routinely called CPS on her for child endangerment. Each time an investigation was opened then closed in a few days. The charges, unfounded. So why did this mother have to repeat the process every time? Another mother had a hostile relationship with the father of her children. Every time she started to date someone new, the father would allege abuse and file a complaint to keep her from moving on. Others



Parents protest unfair practices by Child Protective Services (CPS) that seem to disproportionately target families of color and low-income households.

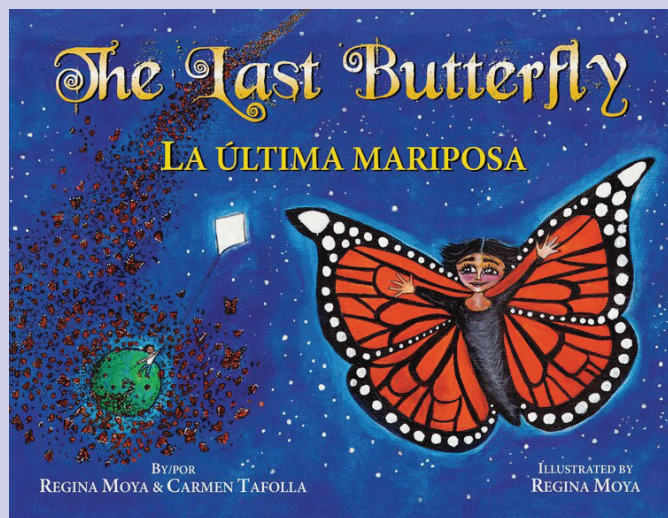
reported arguments with friends or exes resulting in a revenge call to CPS to file false reports. One parent reported that her son’s school called CPS on her because her son had a diagnosed mental illness which he was being treated for but the school wanted him withdrawn. When she refused to withdraw him, they alleged abuse. The case was closed in a few days, but at what point did the system meant to protect become a weapon to attack parents?

The Hechinger Report did a story on the use of CPS by schools to strong-arm parents. “School employees in most states have a legal obligation to report any suspicion of abuse and neglect, and they can play a critical role in helping keep children out of harm’s way. But in nearly three dozen interviews conducted by The Hechinger Report and HuffPost, parents, lawyers, advocates and child welfare officials said that schools occasionally wield this authority inappropriately. Fed up with what they see as obstinate parents who don’t agree to special education services for their child, or disruptive kids who make learning difficult, schools sometimes use the threat of a child-protection investigation to strong-arm parents into complying with the school’s wishes or transferring their children to a new school. That approach is not only improper, it can be devastating for families, even when the allegations are ultimately determined to be unfounded.”

Filing a report with CPS is anonymous. This is supposed to protect victims, but instead has allowed people to hide while making false allegations that could result in a child being taken from their home. Did you know that CPS can go to your child’s

# The Last Butterfly/La Última Mariposa

Book Review by Gloria A. Ramírez, editor of *La Voz de Esperanza*



The beautifully written and illustrated bilingual book, *The Last Butterfly/La Última Mariposa* by co-authors, Carmen Tafolla and Regina Moya, introduces children of all ages to the magic that signals all living beings to live in concert with one another on planet earth. Following the life of Merliga, a chubby and slow caterpillar, who ultimately emerges from her cocoon transformed into a beautiful Monarch butterfly, the reader will share her journey of migration to a place where she will join hundreds of thousands of her kind, but is met, instead, with the unexpected devastation of a forest no longer recognizable as her beloved home. Merliga represents the endangerment

that Monarchs and all animals and plants face with the eradication of natural habitats. Questioning what caused this eradication is certainly something children can talk about. The child protagonist of the story, Manuel, speaks to everyone's potential to save the earth from destruction. In the story, Manuel finds a solution to help guide Merliga and her sisters to their home. Even though, *The Last Butterfly/La Última Mariposa*, is a story and a fantasy, the reality of our planet's possible demise is communicated clearly to children who read or hear this story in English and/or Spanish. The illustrations by Regina Moya communicate the beauty, the devastation and the reawakening of hope from beginning to end. The stewardship of our earth's ambiente depends on its youngest inhabitants developing a love of their natural surroundings and of all sentient beings. The very survival of the planet depends, too, on our imagining new ways of preserving and saving our beautiful blue planet. This book opens up many possibilities for pláticas and discussions with young children about caring for our planet and includes activities that children can participate in to learn more about monarch butterflies. It is also a great springboard for the study of other animals and plants and what we as humans can do to protect and preserve the earth, its inhabitants and natural habitats. Available from Juventud Press: [bit.ly/last-butterfly](http://bit.ly/last-butterfly)



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school and converse with them, without your knowledge or consent? All the cases I've cited were unfounded and closed immediately. Thankfully, the individuals that were investigating were reasonable. What happens when the caseworker isn't reasonable?

Five years ago in a suburb of Houston, a mother of three sat on the porch of her home watching her kids ride bikes from her driveway round the cul-de-sac that her home was in. She was shocked when sheriffs arrived and placed her in handcuffs while her children were taken into CPS custody. She spent the night in jail and her children in a temporary foster home for over a week—all because her neighbor said her children, ages 8-13, were unsupervised. Her neighbor's window allowed her to see the driveway, but not the porch. There had been a dispute between the homeowners about a fence. Is it a problem for children to play outside without constant supervision? I remember being outside all day every day when I was their age. My mother did not watch me every single second. Should a person go to jail and be separated from their children for this?

How much of this abuse is targeted towards low income people of color? In searching news stories, I found that an over-

whelming majority of these instances involved single mothers on a fixed income, mostly women of color. Is this just another way of creating obstacles and fear within our community? How many of you have similar stories?

YouthToday.org cited a report released in 2020 by Movement for Family Power, using numbers from 2017 (the most current available data) that noted, "Over 500,000 parents were determined by the foster system to have mistreated their children. Almost all were low-income and disproportionately Black, Indigenous, Latino or, in some instances LGBTQ parents."

Awareness is the first step in combating this type of abuse in the system. If you do find yourself living this horror story, please, keep a level head. Know your rights. Keep records. If your children are removed from your home, contact Texas RioGrande Legal Aid at 210-212-3700. Never give up hope.

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