

**To: Members of the Cobb County, Georgia Bar
Metro Atlanta Mental Health Professionals**
From: Richard Ducote, Attorney At Law
**Re: The cover-up of child sexual abuse by Diane Woods, Esq.
and Elizabeth King, Ph.D.**
Date: April 29, 2002

A clear lesson to be learned from the current scandal in the Catholic Church is that the cover up of child sexual abuse by those entrusted to stop it or prevent it exacerbates this terrible problem and compounds the extensive damage suffered by the victims. You undoubtedly will find this letter unusual--but it is very necessary.

I represent Wendy Titelman, formerly a resident of Cobb County. I have handled child sexual abuse and domestic violence cases fighting for victims in over 40 states. I served as a special prosecutor for termination of parental rights cases in 40 Louisiana courts. By invitation of courts and professional organizations, I regularly conduct child sexual abuse and domestic violence training for judges, attorneys, mental health professionals, guardians *ad litem*, and custody evaluators nationwide. I have been honored for my work by the American Bar Association, the National Association of Social Workers, The Louisiana State University School of Social Work, and others. My successful cases include *Ankenbrandt v. Richards*, 112 S.Ct. 2206 (1992), which allows child sexual abuse victims to sue their abusive parents in federal court where diversity jurisdiction exists. The Harvard Law Review and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges have praised my groundbreaking legislation enacted to protect abused children in custody cases.

In the Titelman case (Cobb County Superior Court Nos. 98-1-5890-33 and 00-10-8035-33), Diane Woods, a Marietta attorney, was appointed guardian *ad litem* for two young girls. In May, 1999, after a brief investigation, the facts of which she misstated to the court, and despite some emerging evidence of possible sexual abuse by the children's father, Ms. Woods recommended that he be granted custody. However, in June, 1999, the children began revealing more details of their molestation by their father, and Ms. Woods then began sabotaging the DFACS and police investigations of the abuse by telling the authorities that the allegations were false. In a recent sworn deposition, Ms. Woods admits that she has no training or expertise in child sexual abuse. Yet, because of her frequent guardian *ad litem* appointments and her association with SafeHouse, Ms. Woods was able to derail official efforts to protect the children from their father's abuse. In August, 1999, Ms. Woods' good friend Dr. Elizabeth King was appointed as the "custody evaluator," and Ms. Woods "assured" her that the sexual abuse allegations were false. However, Woods refused to speak to the children's therapists who documented the molestations, and to the other adults who either heard the children discuss the abuse, witnessed inappropriate sexualized behavior between the father and one child, or witnessed sexual acting out evidencing molestation. Dr. King disregarded the children's reports to her of their father's fondling them.

Woods and King then arranged for an "emergency hearing" on February 18, 2000, for which Ms. Titelman had one day's notice of the hearing and one hour's notice of the purpose of the hearing. At the "hearing", Woods and King convinced the judge to give the father sole custody and to restrict Ms. Titelman to professionally supervised visitation. When the children continued to complain to the visitation supervisors that their father was "tickling" their "privates" at night and touching them "wrongly," Woods asserted that the supervisors were not doing their job and stopped Ms. Titelman's visits. The final custody trial was heard in June, 2000. In closing argument, John Mayoue, Esq., the father's attorney, implored the trial judge to ignore the abundant evidence of the sexual abuse and to simply listen to Woods and King:

"It is difficult to come in here and have somebody say that everybody is wrong and I fully accept the premise that no one knows what happens behind closed doors. That is why we have professionals because you weren't there and I wasn't there. And we don't know what to do other than to reply upon those with professional expertise in this area and, you know, lawyers and with all due respect, judges

don't have the kind of training that these people have and I am talking about Dr. King and I am talking about Diane and I am talking about DFACS and I think we have to go a tremendous way to say that we are going to substitute our goals and ideas for theirs".

Woods and King carried the day, and on August 4, 2000, the trial court awarded the father sole custody, but restored Ms. Titelman's unsupervised visits. However, soon the children told their mother about more ongoing instances of their father coming to their beds at night and fondling their genitals. As Ms. Titelman had taken the girls to the Mississippi Gulf Coast for the Labor Day weekend- which she was absolutely allowed to do under the custody decree- she had them examined by the forensic psychologist who routinely performs the sexual abuse evaluations for the courts there. Based on his belief that they indeed were being molested by their father, the Harrison County, Mississippi, Chancery Court placed the children in protective custody. During their evaluations, the girls told Dr. Matherne, the Mississippi psychologist, that they tried to tell Dr. King about their father's abuse, but that she would change the subject. In response to the Mississippi court order, King, Woods, Mayoue, and the father immediately traveled to Mississippi in order to force the children's return to their father in Georgia. On September 15, 2000, as a result of bogus criminal charges of "custodial interference" instituted by the father, his attorney John Mayoue, with the assistance of Woods and King, Ms. Titelman was arrested and jailed. She has neither seen nor spoken to her daughters since that date. They still reside with their father. Despite Woods signing a Mississippi consent order that the girls would not be interviewed without a subsequent Georgia court order allowing such, Woods and King "interviewed" the girls on September 16 or 17. Despite the fact that the girls confirmed the molestation in the interview, Wood inferred to DFACS and the custody judge that the girls stated otherwise.

On April 23, 2001, Ms. Titelman's trial for "interstate interference with custody" began in the Cobb County Superior Court (No.00-9-4681-40). In the criminal trial, the actions of Woods and King were exposed as they testified for the State. King was forced to produce her one audiotaped interview with the girls (curiously, she had other interviews, but only taped one), and it clearly illustrated that the girls accurately described her changing the subject when they tried to inform her of the abuse. After a quick deliberation, the jury promptly acquitted Ms. Titelman. The jury was so outraged that they wrote the attached letter to Judge Bodiford, the custody judge, and DA Patrick Head condemning the prosecution of Ms. Titelman and decrying Woods and King's conduct.

Diane Woods and Elizabeth King have covered up the sexual abuse of these children to protect themselves from accountability for their negligent placement of the children in the abusive father's custody in the first place. Many ongoing efforts are underway to correct this tragedy. But the sunshine of truth, as well as professional peer accountability and scrutiny, are indeed necessary to prevent other children from experiencing this same calamity. As Dr. King and Ms. Woods continue to give seminars, testify in court, and affect young lives through the mistaken perception of their infallibility, I, for one, cannot stand by quietly.

I wholeheartedly invite Ms. Woods and Dr. King to sue me if this information is defamatory. I will gladly accept service of the suit, and I say, as I have said in the past, let us get all of the facts before a jury.

It is the truth that will set these two girls free.

Thank you for your attention.

Richard Ducote, Esq.
New Orleans, LA