From the
Duluth Model Power & Control Wheel
to the
EBR Family Court Power & Control Wheel

By Katherine Diamond
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Disclaimer and Scope

This document is an advocacy, pattern-analysis, and personal-experience summary. It is not a court ruling, clinical diagnosis, final legal conclusion, or adjudicated finding of fact.
The statements in this document reflect my personal experience, my good-faith interpretation of court records, transcripts, filings, correspondence, professional conduct, and related documentation in my East Baton Rouge Family Court case. Terms such as **abuse, coercion, misconduct, alienation, retaliation, corruption, fraud, RICO, racketeering, intimidation, and economic abuse** are used to describe my allegations, opinions, conclusions, and theory for investigation.

Nothing in this document should be understood as stating that any person has been found liable, guilty, criminally responsible, professionally disciplined, or judicially determined to have committed wrongdoing unless I specifically cite an official finding, judgment, order, conviction, or disciplinary decision.

This chart adapts the Power and Control Wheel as a visual framework to explain patterns I allege occurred in my case. It is intended to show how repeated events, court procedures, professional conduct, financial pressure, custody restrictions, and loss of access to my children appear to fit together as a system of power and control. The chart is not intended to prove every fact by itself. It should be read together with the underlying records and supporting documentation.

Where I describe possible RICO, fraud, conspiracy, obstruction, abuse of process, parental alienation, professional misconduct, or other unlawful conduct, I am identifying a theory for investigation and review. I am not claiming that a court or investigative agency has already adjudicated those legal elements.

Readers should independently review the supporting documentation before drawing conclusions.

The Original Power and Control Wheel

The **Power and Control Wheel** came out of the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project in Duluth, Minnesota in the early 1980s. It was built from interviews with women about how their partners controlled them. Its purpose was to reframe abuse: not as isolated blow-ups, bad communication, or an anger problem, but as a deliberate pattern aimed at one central goal. That is why **POWER AND CONTROL** sits at the hub. Everything on the wheel is read as serving that center.

The eight spokes are categories of tactics: **coercion and threats, intimidation, emotional abuse, isolation, minimizing/denying/blaming, using children, using privilege, and economic abuse**. The point of breaking abuse into spokes is that any single act can be minimized or denied on its own. An abuser can say, "I was just upset," "I only said it once," "I was only trying to protect the children," or "I was just enforcing the rules." But when the acts are placed together as parts of one wheel, they stop looking like unrelated events. They reveal a coherent system of control.

The outer rim is the part people often overlook, and it is the key to how the wheel works. In the original Power and Control Wheel, the rim is **physical and sexual violence**. It is drawn as the band that holds the spokes together. The point is not that physical violence happens every day. The point is that the threat, memory, or possibility of violence gives force to the other tactics. A demand backed by violence is not just a demand. A threat made by someone who has already harmed you is not just words. The outer rim supplies the coercive force that makes the other tactics effective.

My EBR Family Court Adaptation

My **EBR Family Court Power and Control Wheel** applies the same structure to family court abuse. The center remains **POWER AND CONTROL**. The spokes remain the same categories of tactics. But the outer rim changes. In this version, the coercive outer rim is not physical and sexual violence. It is **ABUSIVE COURT ORDERS AND JUDGMENTS**. My chart identifies the outer ring that way and maps the same eight abuse tactics onto my family court case.

This is the core insight: **family court can convert private coercive control into court-backed coercive control.**

In domestic abuse, the abuser may enforce control through fear of physical violence. In family court abuse, the same control can be enforced through fear of losing children, being jailed for contempt, being financially ruined, being put in supervised visitation, being labeled unstable, being cut off from evidence, or being forced to litigate endlessly just to maintain a relationship with one's children. The mechanism changes, but the goal does not. The goal remains power and control.

My Thesis

My thesis is that, in my case, Robert Ragland's desire for power and control over me was not neutralized by family court. It was amplified, legitimized, and monetized.

Instead of protecting my relationship with my children, the court process became the coercive mechanism used to separate me from them. Instead of requiring evidence before restricting contact, the process allowed uninvestigated allegations, smear narratives, contempt threats, professional gatekeeping, and financial barriers to control whether I could see or speak to my children. Instead of treating me as a parent with constitutional rights, the process treated Robert Ragland as the default parent and me as someone who had to earn, pay for, or beg for access.

The chart shows the pattern.

Under **USING COERCION AND THREATS**, the court process is used to threaten jail, contempt, custody loss, loss of contact, deferred sentencing, and harsh rulings unless I stipulate or comply.

Under **USING INTIMIDATION**, the courtroom itself becomes a place of fear: screaming, threats, security treatment, hostile proceedings, and the message that the outcome is already predetermined.

Under **USING EMOTIONAL ABUSE**, my reputation and stability are attacked through public humiliation, smear narratives, false dangerous-person labels, false stalking and abuse accusations, psychiatric insinuations, name-calling, and the use of my grief over lost contact with my children against me.

Under **USING ISOLATION**, I am cut off from my children, placed behind supervised visitation, separated through delays, deprived of observers, and stripped of attorneys who fervently advocate for me.

Under **USING CHILDREN**, access to my children is used as leverage. Contact is restricted. Supervision is used to control the narrative. Allegations are used to justify no contact. My efforts to see my children are framed as harmful.

Under **MINIMIZING, DENYING, AND BLAMING**, the court refuses to hear my visitation and contempt motions, ignores my court-ordered psychological evaluation, dismisses evidence that contradicts the narrative, and uses grief caused by professional misconduct to justify complete parental alienation.

Under **USING PRIVILEGE**, Robert Ragland is treated as the real parent and the full participant in the court system, while my access to my children is controlled by him, his narrative is treated as truth, and my constitutional rights are ignored.

Under **USING ECONOMIC ABUSE**, my access to my children is conditioned on money. Inflated visitation fees, child support while contact is denied, contempt litigation, attorney fees, and transcript charges drain my resources and make resistance financially punishing.

This is why the outer ring of my wheel is **ABUSIVE COURT ORDERS AND JUDGMENTS**. The court order is not neutral in this model. The order is the enforcement mechanism. It is what turns the abuser's private desire for control into state-backed control.

The original Power and Control Wheel shows how abuse works when private violence holds the pattern together. My EBR Family Court Power and Control Wheel shows how abuse works when court authority holds the pattern together.

Domestic-Violence Infrastructure, Conflicts of Interest, and Court-Backed Control

This section is not about minimizing real domestic violence. Real domestic violence should be investigated, proven, and addressed with lawful protection. The problem I am identifying is different: **false, untested, exaggerated, or strategically used abuse allegations can be adjudicated inside EBR Family Court through an overlapping domestic-violence and family-court infrastructure that creates immediate custody control, long-term separation, paid professional involvement, and near-impossible appellate review.**

In my case, the issue was not that multiple petitions for protection from abuse were filed. The issue was that **one Petition for Protection from Abuse became the basis for repeated TROs, continuances, extensions, renewals, and long-term restrictions.** The published appellate opinion states that Robert filed a Petition for Protection from Abuse on May 1, 2020, that the TRO was effective through May 20, 2020, and that the matter was initially set for a May 20, 2020 hearing. The same opinion states that Ebony Cavalier appeared as attorney on behalf of Iris Domestic Violence Intervention Center, Inc., and requested that the matter be passed and reassigned to June 17, 2020.

The appellate opinion also records my argument that the trial court continued issuing or extending "temporary" orders of protection over almost two years when only one petition for protection from abuse had been filed into the record, and that no hearing occurred within the time required by La. R.S. 46:2135. A later appellate opinion likewise states that the May 1, 2020 petition was not heard until February 2, 2022.

That is the core of the problem. A temporary emergency filing did not remain temporary. It became the entry point into nearly two years of TROs before adjudication, followed by a permanent protective order and 4 more years to date of continued separation from my children and on going.

Louisiana's domestic-violence office structure in East Baton Rouge is also important. Public materials state that domestic-abuse and dating-violence restraining-order matters are handled through **Family Court, Domestic Violence Office**, located at **300 North Boulevard, East Baton Rouge Courthouse, 2nd Floor, Room 2801**. This office is under the responsibility of the Domestic Violence Prevention Commission. This is important because reporting to this office rather than DCFS or the police subverts investigation and post forensic interviews both DCFS and the police would utilize.

That means the protective-order process is not separate from the courthouse and family-court environment. It is physically and operationally embedded in the same courthouse structure that later controls custody, visitation, credibility, supervision, contempt, fees, and access to children.

The Domestic Violence Prevention Commission is also relevant. Louisiana law creates the Domestic Violence Prevention Commission and charges it with assisting local and state leaders in coordinating domestic-violence programs, reviewing public and private domestic-violence programs, making recommendations, ensuring domestic-violence laws are properly implemented, and providing training to law enforcement and the judiciary. Public board records lists now retired **Judge Pamela Baker** as a member of the Domestic Violence Prevention Commission. The Legislature's member list identifies Pamela J. Baker in a district-court-judge seat with family-law experience. Recent legislation by Representative Kellee Hennessee provided the ability for Pamela Baker to remain on the Board after retirement. Also the Board that over sees the Domestic Violence Office are 2 additional EBR Family Court Attorneys and EBR Family Court attorney Laurie Marien works for DSFS even though she has simultaneously represented an individual with felony child endangerment charges and an open DCFS investigation at the time of engagement. It is my understanding that Marien serving as the alleged abusers attorney and had the DCFS investigation closed and had the criminal abuse charges moved to EBR Family Court where the alleged abuser was given full medical decision making over the child.

This matters because Judge Baker was also the EBR Family Court judge presiding over my case. A public LSU CLE biography identifies Pamela J. Baker as a judge of the Family Court for East Baton Rouge Parish and states that she served as Treasurer of the Board of Directors of Iris Domestic Violence Center.

Kim Sport is part of the broader domestic-violence law and policy context. A public biography states that Sport drafted and successfully advocated for five domestic-violence bills, was elected the first chairman of the Louisiana Commission to Prevent Domestic Violence, and drafted or spearheaded amendments to more than 150 provisions of

domestic-violence law. My concern is not that domestic-violence laws should not exist. My concern is that when powerful domestic-violence laws are administered through a conflicted family court environment without reliable independent investigation, they can be used to produce the same coercive control they were designed to prevent.

My allegation is that the EBR domestic violence office, Iris Domestic Violence Center, the Domestic Violence Prevention Commission, EBR Family Court judges, court connected attorneys, and family court professionals operate within an overlapping institutional network. I further allege that other EBR Family Court professionals serve on or benefit from these same domestic violence structures and use the courthouse domestic violence office in their cases. Those overlapping roles create a serious appearance of conflict because the same network that promotes, processes, assists, hears, extends, enforces, and benefits from domestic-violence allegations can also control custody, visitation, credibility, supervision, attorney fees, and contempt.

That is the conflict-of-interest structure I am identifying.

The domestic-violence label is not merely descriptive. It is the gateway to custody loss, supervised visitation, paid evaluations, expert witnesses, attorney-fee claims, compliance programs, transcript costs, contempt exposure, and years of litigation. When that label is attached without independent investigation, it can become a tool of court-backed coercive control.

In my case, I allege there was no independent criminal investigation establishing the allegations before the court treated me as dangerous; no DCFS investigation or finding before custody and contact were restricted; no forensic interview; no medical examination; and no neutral investigative process. Instead, Judge Pamela Baker handled the matter inside EBR Family Court with EBR Family Court professionals, while paid family-court experts and domestic-violence-connected personnel replaced independent investigators.

This is the mechanism I am describing:

One Petition for Protection from Abuse was filed in the Domestic Violence Office.

The filing was processed through a courthouse domestic violence office located in the same building as EBR Family Court.

IRIS Domestic Violence Intervention Center appeared through counsel, even though I allege IRIS had no proper role in my case.

The presiding judge had documented ties to both Iris Domestic Violence Center and the Domestic Violence Prevention Commission.

The TRO was renewed, reissued, or functionally extended for approximately twenty-two months before adjudication.

No independent criminal, DCFS, forensic, or medical investigation established the allegations before my contact with my children was restricted. No one ever spoke to, examined, or observed my children or myself in any way. There was no type of investigation whatsoever.

The abuse narrative controlled custody, visitation, credibility, access, and years of expensive litigation and court ordered activities.

The protective-order label triggered supervised visitation, evaluations, paid professionals, attorney fees, transcript costs, contempt exposure, and appeal barriers.

The parent-child relationship became controlled by court orders and paid professionals.

The court order became the coercive weapon.

This is where my EBR Family Court Power and Control Wheel begins. The outer rim of the wheel is **ABUSIVE COURT ORDERS AND JUDGMENTS** because those orders are the enforcement mechanism. In the original Power and Control Wheel, physical and sexual violence hold the system together. In my family-court version, the TRO, protective order, custody order, contempt order, supervised-visitation order, evaluation order, and fee order hold the system together.

The original wheel explains private coercive control.

My wheel explains court-backed coercive control.

The false or untested abuse allegation is the entry point.

The courthouse domestic-violence infrastructure is the gateway.

The TRO is the first weapon.

The permanent protective order becomes the long-term control structure.

The paid professional network becomes the machinery.

The children become the leverage.

The money becomes the incentive.

Under my thesis, EBR Family Court and its affiliated domestic violence structures created or enabled a system where one untested abuse petition became years of court-backed coercive control, parental alienation, and monetized litigation. The abuser's desire for power and control was not stopped. It was translated into court orders, professional fees, supervised visitation, attorney-fee claims, transcripts, evaluations, contempt exposure, and years of restricted access to my children.

Domestic-Violence Infrastructure, Conflicts of Interest, and Court-Backed Control

One additional fact is important to understanding why I developed this theory. I first learned about the Power and Control Wheel at a meeting of the Domestic Violence Prevention Commission. Present at that meeting were professionals whose roles overlap with the same East Baton Rouge family-court and domestic-violence infrastructure discussed in this paper, including former EBR Family Court Judge Pamela J. Baker and EBR Family Court attorney Laurie Marien, who is also identified as Executive Director of the Louisiana Women's Policy and Research Commission / Governor's Office of Women's Policy. Judge Baker's public professional profile reflects extensive involvement in family court, domestic-violence policy, judicial education, victim-services structures, and related boards and commissions.

That context matters. These are not professionals unfamiliar with domestic-violence dynamics. They appear to understand coercive control, abuser behavior, victim responses, protective-order systems, custody litigation, supervised visitation, expert involvement, grants, fundraising, and the institutional machinery surrounding domestic-violence services. Because of that, I do not believe the events in my case were merely random mistakes or isolated failures. My concern is that knowledge developed to identify and prevent coercive control can be weaponized inside family court: abuse narratives can be used to transfer control to the favored parent, isolate the targeted parent, shape the children's narrative, force paid supervised visitation, and keep both parents paying into prolonged litigation. For that reason, this paper should be read as a systemic theory of court-enabled coercive control and monetization.

Laurie Marien, Director of The Governor’s Office of Women’s Policy, attended the Georgia Commission of Family Violence’s Annual Convention.

Governor Landry signed several bills into law that will make a meaningful difference for children and families across our state. These measures include improving services for foster care youth, increasing awareness of the Safe Haven Law, strengthening child protection proceedings, providing new protections for young girls, and establishing a Commission on

Fatherhood Engagement. We are proud to support efforts that help create a future where every child thrives in a loving environment, supported by empowered families and resilient communities.

SB 371 and SB 259 expand Louisiana's domestic-violence infrastructure and the resources available to agencies, programs, and professionals operating within that system. My concern is not that domestic violence should be ignored, but that these measures primarily expand the system's authority, funding, and operational capacity without requiring meaningful evaluation of whether the programs reduce domestic-violence incidence, improve family outcomes, prevent false allegations, protect due-process rights, or reduce the number of children separated from fit parents. Before additional expansion occurs, lawmakers should require measurable outcomes, independent oversight, and evidence that the system is accomplishing its stated goals.

How EBR Family Court Monetizes Power and Control

My thesis is that EBR Family Court professionals have created, enabled, or tolerated a structure that **monetizes an abuser's desire for power and control**.

An abusive party wants control over the ex-spouse. The family court system gives that party tools: custody threats, supervised visitation, contempt, psychological evaluations, expert witnesses, attorney-fee awards, transcript charges, repeated hearings, delayed rulings, and professional gatekeeping. Each tool serves two purposes at once. It increases control over the targeted parent, and it generates money for the professionals attached to the conflict.

EBR Family Court monetizes both sides of coercive control. The abusing parent pays to maintain power, protect the narrative, conceal abuse, and keep the targeted parent under pressure. The targeted parent pays to defend credibility, preserve access to the children, respond to motions, obtain records, and challenge abusive orders. Every motion, delay, allegation, transcript, evaluation, supervised visit, contempt filing, and attorney-fee claim turns the abuser's desire for control and the targeted parent's need to parent into revenue. That is the monetization scheme.

The Hughes letter supports this concern in broader terms. It describes EBR Family Court as having structural and cultural problems, including a small group of family-law attorneys appearing before the same judges repeatedly, reports of favoritism, and a "club" dynamic in which insiders receive efficient service while outsiders are treated as pariahs. It also states that status conferences are used to "intimidate and coerce," that contempt is used to force the non-favored parent into submission, and that economic leverage is applied through counselors, therapists, and psychological evaluations.

The letter further describes a tactic of building a smear narrative against the opposing litigant through letters, emails, and status conferences rather than through actual evidence, and it identifies closed courtrooms as a method used to isolate and intimidate litigants. It also states that litigation is extended to the "Nth degree," with experts, discovery, exhibits, and attorney fees making review economically and practically difficult.

That matters because the abuse is not just emotional. It is financial and procedural. A parent is not simply being insulted. A parent is being forced to pay to defend against labels, pay to seek visitation, pay to respond to contempt, pay for professionals, pay for transcripts, and pay support while being denied meaningful contact. The Hughes letter specifically notes concerns about transcript fees, stating that Family Court is charging $6.50 per page when, according to the letter, the statutory rate was $1.50 per page.

This is how coercive control becomes profitable. The more the abuser wants control, the more litigation can be generated. The more litigation is generated, the more the targeted parent is drained. The more the targeted parent is drained, the easier they are to control. The system does not merely fail to stop the abuse; under this thesis, it converts the abuse into a continuing financial engine.

The Central Theory

The family court professionals do not have to create the abuser's desire for control. They only have to recognize it, encourage it, and give it legal tools.

Once the abuser's control agenda enters the court system, it becomes monetizable. Custody becomes leverage. Supervised visitation becomes a paid barrier. Evaluations become paid hurdles. Contempt becomes a threat and a fee generator. Transcripts become expensive obstacles. Delays become billable time. Smear narratives become litigation strategy. The children become the emotional weapon. The targeted parent's desperation to maintain a bond with the children becomes the pressure point.

Private abuse becomes profitable when the court system turns the abuser's desire for control into billable conflict and enforceable court orders.

EBR Family Court monetizes coercive control by converting an abuser's need for power over the targeted parent into prolonged litigation, paid professional intervention, supervised access, attorney fees, contempt exposure, and court-backed deprivation of the parent-child relationship.

This chart is not meant to prove every legal element by itself. It is a pattern map. It shows how the tactics fit together, how the money flows, how the parent-child relationship is used as leverage, and how court power becomes the replacement for the physical-force rim of the original Power and Control Wheel.

Why This Matters Beyond Money

The financial structure matters because it explains how the system keeps going. But the harm is not only financial. Money is the engine. The damage is human, developmental, constitutional, and institutional.

When family court monetizes coercive control, the parent-child relationship becomes the object being bought, restricted, supervised, delayed, and litigated. The targeted parent pays to preserve access. The favored or abusive parent pays to maintain control and preserve the narrative. Court professionals, attorneys, supervisors, evaluators, court reporters, and affiliated service providers are paid while the family relationship deteriorates.

But the deepest loss is not the money. It is the loss of children.

A child's relationship with a safe and loving parent is not a luxury. It is a central developmental need. When a court cuts off contact, delays hearings, forces supervised visitation, ignores motions, or allows one parent to control all access, the court is not merely managing a case. It is shaping a child's attachment, identity, emotional safety, and understanding of reality.

The harm compounds over time. A temporary restriction can become practical alienation. A delayed hearing can become months or years of lost relationship. Supervised visitation can become a paid substitute for parenting. A child can be taught, directly or indirectly, that the targeted parent is dangerous, unstable, or unworthy of trust before the truth has been independently established. By the time the court revisits the issue, the child's lived experience has already been altered.

This also harms both parents. The targeted parent is forced to grieve the living loss of children they are legally responsible for but not meaningfully allowed to parent. The favored or abusive parent is incentivized to keep the conflict alive because control depends on preserving the narrative. Both sides are monetized. The abusing parent pays to maintain control, conceal abuse, and keep the targeted parent under pressure. The targeted parent pays to defend credibility, seek access, obtain records, respond to motions, and challenge abusive orders. The professionals profit from the continuation of the conflict.

The gravest risk is that false or untested abuse allegations may cause the court to place children with the actual abuser. When family court lacks independent investigative safeguards, children can be placed with dangerous parents while the safe parent is restricted, discredited, or erased. In extreme cases, this can expose children to sexual abuse, exploitation, or child sexual-abuse material. These are not issues that should be filtered through paid family-court narratives alone. Allegations of child abuse, sexual abuse, exploitation, or child sexual-abuse material require independent investigation by qualified law enforcement and child-protection authorities, not merely private custody

litigation managed by paid professionals. Examples of this can be viewed in testimony presented in the Senate's Special Committee for Women and Children on September 29, 2025 at the 3 hour and 49 minute mark on this video viewable through this QR Code:

You can also view Legislator's reaction to Kim Sport testifying about how well the Domestic Violence Laws she created are protecting children on the following video from the meeting on October 15, 2025 of the "Task Force on Child Abuse Investigation Processes" at the 3 hour and 52 minute point:

Sadly, it does not seem like Kim Sport's assertions are supported by the torturous reality many people such as myself experience every day.

That is why the lack of investigation matters so much. A family court abuse finding can operate like a criminal accusation without criminal-court safeguards. There may be no until independent evidence review, and no neutral investigative process before a parent is branded dangerous and separated from the children. Paid family-court experts then replace independent investigators, and the court order becomes the controlling force.

This is also a public-trust issue. Courts depend on public confidence that judges are neutral, evidence matters, hearings are meaningful, and children's best interests are not being converted into revenue. When courtrooms are closed, observers are excluded or forced to identify themselves, attorneys who fight are disqualified, transcript fees become barriers to review, and motions for visitation are not heard, the public has reason to question whether the process is justice or merely control. The Hughes letter captures the same concern when it describes serious structural and cultural problems in EBR Family Court and states that sacrificing children to make money is immoral.

The constitutional concern is equally serious. Parents have fundamental rights in the care, custody, and control of their children. A court system that deprives a parent of meaningful contact through untested allegations, delayed hearings, professional gatekeeping, and financially impossible conditions does not merely inconvenience that parent. It burdens a fundamental relationship. When the burden is imposed without reliable fact-finding, meaningful access to review, or neutral safeguards, the issue becomes larger than family conflict. It becomes a question of due process, equal protection, and whether parental rights can be converted into privileges controlled by the favored parent and paid court professionals.

This is why my Power and Control Wheel matters. It is not simply a complaint about fees. The wheel shows how money, custody, reputation, professional authority, and court orders work together. My adapted chart identifies **ABUSIVE COURT ORDERS AND JUDGMENTS** as the outer coercive ring because, in this system, court authority can become the force that holds the abuse together.

The issue is not only that people are being charged too much. The issue is that families are being broken, children may be placed at risk, parent-child relationships are being destroyed, constitutional rights are being burdened, and public confidence in the court is being eroded.

Money explains the incentive.

Power and control explain the motive.

The damage falls on the children, the targeted parent, the integrity of the family, and the legitimacy of the justice system.

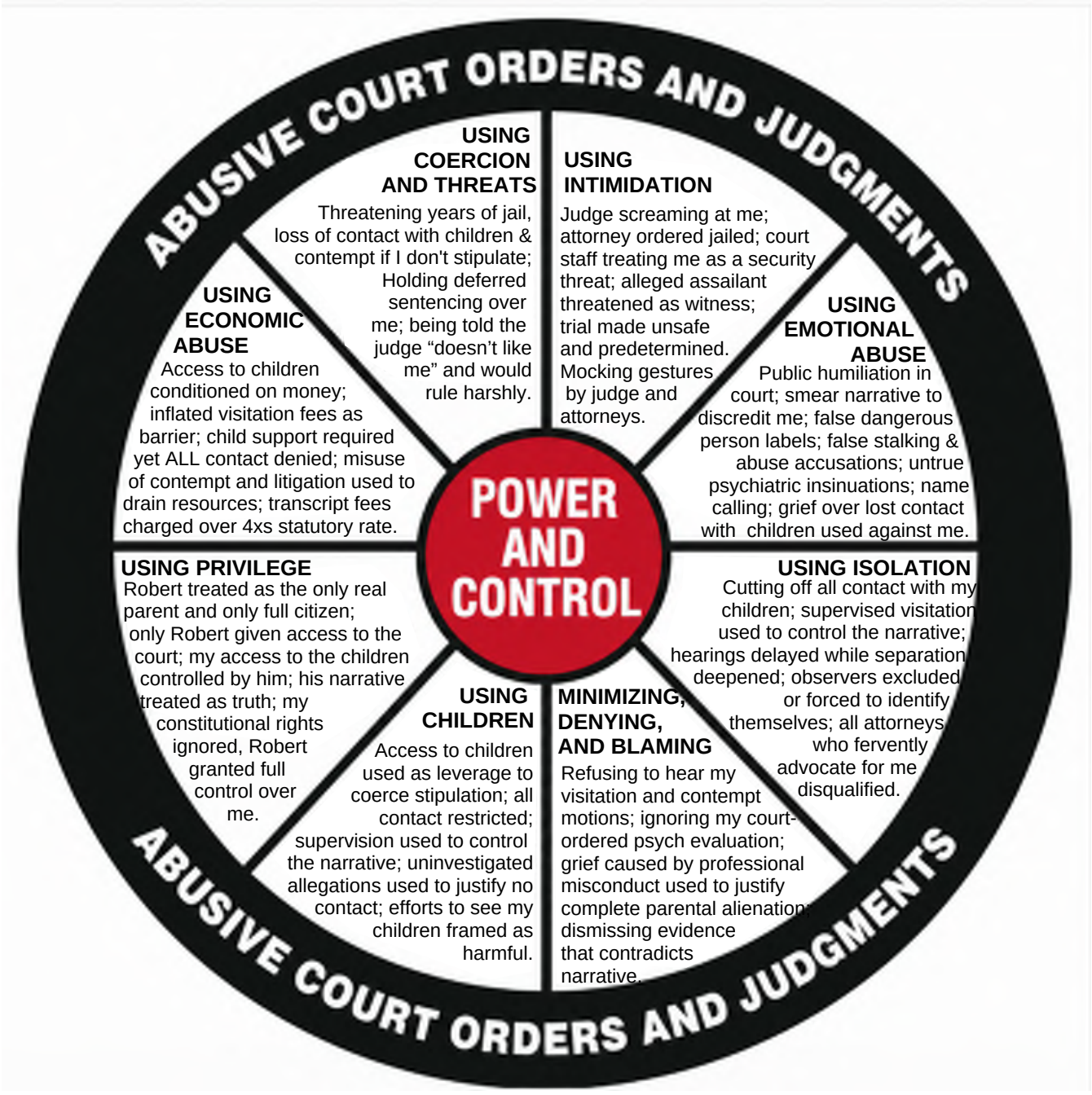
How to Read the Chart

This chart adapts the Power and Control Wheel to my EBR Family Court case. **POWER AND CONTROL** is the center. The eight wedges are the tactics. The outer ring — **ABUSIVE COURT ORDERS AND JUDGMENTS** — is the coercive force that gives those tactics power in family court.

The chart should be read as a pattern, not as isolated events. It shows how threats, intimidation, emotional abuse, isolation, use of children, economic pressure, privilege, and blame can work together through court authority to control a parent and restrict the parent-child relationship.

POWER AND CONTROL WHEEL

EBR FAMILY COURT
POWER AND CONTROL WHEEL



JEFF HUGHES
Post Office Box 907
Walker, Louisiana 70785
[redacted]

December 8, 2025

Hon. Kathy Edmonston
State Representative, District 88
2115 S. Burnside, Suite C
Gonzales, LA 70737

Re: Senate Resolution 81

Dear Representative Edmonston,

In response to your request co-signed by Representatives Coates, Dickerson, Egan, Mack, McMakin, Owen, Zeringue, and Senators Hodges and Selders, for results of the study requested and recommendations made pursuant to SR 81, I offer the following.

A committee consisting of you, Senator Fields, and myself requested that the supreme court appoint a supernumerary judge as has been employed in Caddo and Orleans Parishes to study the East Baton Rouge Family Court. Retired James Kuhn was appointed for a six-month term which a majority of the court voted to allow to expire in March, 2025. Judge Kuhn's findings will be provided to the Legislature separately. I will include some of them in my study of the family court which continued after Judge Kuhn's termination, including observations of the ad hoc judges appointed to hear the six cases Judge Kuhn had chosen to preside over.

As I explained at the outset, the supreme court cannot intervene in litigation unless it reaches the court via a properly perfected writ or appeal.

However, the many complaints from varied sources and my study of the practice in the family court indicate serious problems.

The problems are both structural and cultural. The four judges hear all family cases. A small handful of lawyers who "specialize" in family law are in court with the same judges day after day, week after week. There are reports of judges and lawyers having breakfast together at the City Club and then appearing in the same courtroom together 30 minutes later. There are reports of judges and lawyers after a day in court drinking together at the City Club. This is nothing new. In 1990 after losing a case in family court, an attorney took his date to dinner and there sat his opposing counsel of the day, Al Fishbein, with the presiding judge, Tony Graphia.

While Judge Kuhn cites a public perception of favoritism, I believe the line has been crossed to actual favoritism. In one instance the judge *sua sponte* called a status conference at night at a restaurant where alcohol was consumed. Decisions were made about the case, for example whether a certain expert witness would be allowed to testify. The "non-favored" attorney withdrew, telling her client she could not compete with that attorney and that judge. This complaint has been almost universal. It is well known that when a certain lawyer appears before a certain judge, that lawyer never loses. Several litigants have been told this by attorneys, as reasons for not taking their case or for withdrawing after attempting to represent them. It has been suggested by more than one attorney that some sort of pay-off is involved, but there is no evidence of that other than the provision of a chauffeuring service for the judge to events where alcohol is served, such as CLE receptions and bar association social events.

Newer judges take their cue from the more experienced ones, as does the staff. Those in the "club" receive efficient service, while those not in the club, especially pro se litigants who have run out of options for representation,

are treated as pariahs. Staff smirk, roll their eyes, and call out "Security, Security!" when they approach.

The attorney, not the judge, controls the pace of litigation. Matters that are supposed to be heard by law within days are continued for months, until the parent who has not had any contact with their children caves and "stipulates."

If by chance an attorney puts up a good fight, specious grounds are urged to "disqualify" them. The judge accommodates, leaving the client lawyerless at a critical juncture.

"Status conferences" are used to intimidate and coerce. Clients are told they must agree with the judges' recommendation or the result will be worse, or, if they have been held previously to be in contempt of court, they will go to jail.

Contempt of court is used to beat the non-favored parent into submission. Its all about the money, not the best interests of the children. Attorneys fees in connection with contempt proceedings are routinely awarded in the $10,000 range. In one case an attorneys fee of $28,000 was awarded. Judgments are rendered where more must be paid in attorneys fees than the child support arrearage. In one case attorneys fees of nearly $80,000 have been awarded. It cannot be in the best interest of children to have one parent pay the attorney for the other parent $80,000.

Economic leverage is applied through counselors, therapists, and psychological evaluations. Like so many things in family court, these are in the judges' discretion whether to order or not, and are rarely reviewed. An example is worth mentioning. A certain lawyer requested and a certain judge ordered that a parent undergo a psychological evaluation before that parent could exercise visitation. The evaluator was picked by the judge. When the judge asked about the evaluation, the attorney for the parent being evaluated

responded, "You will be able to read it for yourself. She- She's not required to be on medication, she's not required –." He was interrupted by the judge: "All right. I don't want to know that. I just want to know if it's competed." Apparently the content of the report was not important, just that the hurdle had been crossed.

Furthermore, once a parent has been labeled an "abuser," they must by law bear all the costs for these add-ons, including the other side's attorneys fees if they happen to resist and attempt to litigate. While perhaps well-intentioned in conception, this law is likely unconstitutional and needs to be amended. The threat that a parent seeking visitation will end up paying for multiple experts and the other parent's attorneys fees is another form of coercion.

Another tactic is the formation of a narrative to smear the opposing litigant, not through evidence from the witness stand, but from letters and emails and in status conferences suggesting the other parent is troubled, needs counseling or therapy, or is even dangerous. As the case is continued month after month, without an actual hearing the narrative is built with no real evidence to support it.

Another tactic is the closing of the courtroom to isolate and intimidate. The non-favored litigant can be screamed at and threatened with jail when no one is there to witness. Family, friends, legislators, and journalists have all been ordered out of the court room. To this day observers are required to stand and identify themselves, as a matter of practice separate and apart from a valid motion to sequester.

Procedure is at the whim of the family court judge instead of the Code of Civil Procedure. One party files a motion for contempt because they are not receiving the visitation ordered by judgment. The response is a motion for contempt or some other motion from the other (favored) party. The first-

filed motion is never set for hearing, or both motions are set for the same day and heard "together," thus depriving the first party of the moral force of their presentation.

Family law has been turned on its head. The best interests of the children are supposed to be paramount. The parents, by law, are supposed to facilitate the relationship of the children with the other parent. Instead, we have endless litigation which makes review economically and practically difficult and seems only to enrich the attorney. In many cases there appears to be a wealthy family on one side willing to pay the bill. In more than one case there is valuable community property, including equity in the family home. This wealth can be attached by the attorney holding judgments for attorneys fees in connection with contempt findings.

Family court cases are supposed to be handled swiftly, in "summary" proceedings. This is best for the parents and the children, so that school, activities, health needs, and schedules can be set and adapted to. Instead, matters are litigated to the Nth degree. Simple requests that would normally just be a formality are met with discovery requests, expert witnesses, and stacks of (largely irrelevant and duplicative) exhibits because, as openly threatened, the "abuser" will have to pay for it all including the fees of the other attorney. Sacrificing children to make money is immoral.

Recommendations:

1. Actual favoritism where a quid pro quo can be shown would best be handled by criminal authorities.
2. Civil Code article 135 should be amended to provide that a custody hearing may be closed to the public only if all parties agree in writing.
3. All proceedings in the EBR Family Court, including status conferences, shall be live-streamed effective August 1, 2026.

4. Amend LSA-R.S. 46:2135 (E) to delete the language "unless good cause is shown for further continuance." 21 days plus 15 days is still too much for a parent to be separated from child without an opportunity to speak, but at least multiple abusive continuances will be prevented.
5. Amend LSA 46:2136.1 as follows: Add to subsection A, "After the initial hearing contemplated by 46: 2135, all costs will be assessed as in any other civil proceeding, and each party will be responsible for its own attorneys fees."

This will protect one who has truly been abused but will level the playing field for one wrongfully accused of abuse.

Worth noting:

1. The Family Court is illegally charging $6.50 per page for transcripts with the court collecting part of the money. By statute they may only charge $1.50 per page.
2. A judge may not be removed from office during his or her term. The term of all family court judges ends on December 31, 2026. By majority vote the Legislature could dissolve The Family Court.

Please let me know if I can assist in any way. Thank you for your interest, without which these matters would not have been addressed, although I believe inevitably these matters would have come to light because it's the worst thing I've seen in my 47-year legal career.

Very truly yours,

Jeff Hughes