

[Name of mediator, evaluator, or recommending counselor]
[Street address]
[City, state zip]

Dear [name of child custody mediator, evaluator, or recommending counselor]:

I am the [petitioner/respondent] in the pending family court case, [case name] (case no. [#]), involving child custody and visitation of [children's names], children in common with [opposing party name]. As a [transgender (trans)¹ and/or intersex²] survivor of domestic violence (DV), I am submitting this letter to you to address potential issues that disproportionately impact [trans and/or intersex] survivors of domestic abuse. I am hopeful this letter will supplement my pleadings and other evidence to help you better understand my family and me, and make the [mediation/evaluation] more effective. Specifically, this letter addresses my arrest for DV on [date], my lack of prior disclosure of the abuse at the hands of the other party, my constitutional right to medical privacy, and my ability to parent as a [trans and/or intersex] individual. These issues are interrelated, and have been discussed in some depth in pertinent social science literature.

First, regarding the arrest on my record, in that scenario, I was actually the victim, not the perpetrator, of DV. [Briefly describe what happened.] On that occasion, the other party and I were both arrested. [Or change to fit your case.] This is actually typical for trans survivors of DV.

Based on a non-representative national sample of transgender, lesbian, gay, and bisexual DV survivors, a recent study found that, when police were involved in DV incidents, about 13% of clients were arrested, either alone or with their abuser.³ This number, which likely undercounts all trans people's experiences, is at least five times higher than the dual arrest rate found among the general population of DV survivors across the country.⁴ Indeed, according to the most comprehensive survey of trans people in the U.S., almost 10% of trans people have been arrested and held by police due to their gender identity or expression alone.⁵ No study has yet been done for intersex survivors, although logic suggests similar rates would occur. Failure of adequate police response to DV calls can make survivors like myself less likely to "seek police assistance in the future,"⁶ which underscores why [trans and/or intersex] victims of DV are less likely to seek police assistance than other victims.⁷

The higher dual arrest rate for trans DV survivors is likely because of one or more of the following reasons: (1) responding officers often "are not trained to identify primary aggressor roles";⁸ (2) implicit or explicit bias or prejudice against trans individuals, whether actual or perceived;⁹ (3) the over-policing of trans individuals, especially trans women of color, who may be "profiled as sex workers";¹⁰ and (4) trans survivors, like victims in other marginalized communities, are more likely to "fight back,"¹¹ although this does not constitute mutual battering¹² or being a primary aggressor under California law. Although information regarding dual arrest rates for intersex DV survivors has not been studied, available information regarding arrest of trans individuals is likely similar to what intersex DV survivors experience.

Second, I want to acknowledge this is the first time I am disclosing the abuse I have suffered at the hands of the opposing party. Anticipating possible concerns regarding my credibility of these allegations, I wish to explain why I had not previously disclosed the abuse in court. One reason is that I had concerns about what would happen to my relationship with [children's names], with whom I have a loving parental relationship. However, without a biological or adoptive connection, I feared losing custody and visitation to the opposing party, who does have such a connection. My fears are shared by many [trans and/or intersex] survivors of DV.¹³

Moreover, I have had doubts about whether I could even be a victim of DV, and have felt shame and embarrassment about what the opposing party had done to me.¹⁴ Furthermore, as with many [trans and/or intersex] survivors of DV, I feared the backlash I would face from my own community, as well as society at large, if I chose to disclose the abuse.¹⁵

Third, I understand there may be questions about my medical or physiological condition, as a [trans and/or intersex] individual, beyond what I have already stated.¹⁶ I would like to assert here, however, that any such question is irrelevant. That is, any evidence about my medical or physiological condition, as related to my [trans and/or intersex] identity, would not "hav[e] any tendency in reason to prove or disprove any disputed fact that is of consequence to the determination" of custody and visitation.¹⁷ Examples of irrelevant, and frankly offensive, questions would be: "Have you transitioned, or do you plan to?" or "What genitalia do you have?" Whether I have medically or surgically transitioned, or plan to, is beside the point when considering the best interests of [children's names].¹⁸ Further, requiring me to disclose any such information without a court hearing and order on the issue would likely violate my constitutional right to medical privacy.¹⁹

Fourth, I want to address any doubts or concerns you may have about my ability to lovingly and effectively parent [children's names] due to my [gender and/or sex] identity. Although "[r]esearch on families with a transgender parent is scarce,"²⁰ "social science research strongly refutes concerns that a parent's gender identity may negatively affect a child."²¹ There is even less research on intersex parents, although there is no reason to think intersex parents are any less able and willing to properly raise children.

The above reasons help demonstrate why I, a [trans and/or intersex] victim abuse, was at much higher risk of being arrested, and was indeed arrested on [dates]. Additionally, the above explains why I had previously been unable to, or otherwise chose not to, disclose the abuse I was suffering at the hands of the opposing party. Moreover, I hereby assert my constitutional right to medical privacy. Finally, as a [trans and/or intersex] parent, I am no less capable of loving, nurturing, and raising [children's names]. While I understand the generalizations of any research article may not necessarily apply to every [trans and/or intersex] survivor of DV, the conclusions apply to me as I have explained.

I am happy to discuss any questions you may have regarding these, or other, points at our next scheduled meeting on [date]. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

[sign]

[name]

¹ By trans, I mean my gender identity is not the same as the biological sex assigned at birth. (See, e.g., Am. Psychological Assn., *Answers to Your Questions About Transgender People, Gender Identity, and Gender Expression* (2011) p. 1.)

² By intersex, I mean I was born with a medical condition that caused ambiguities or abnormalities with one or more sex characteristics. (See, e.g., Human Rights Watch, *"I Want to Be Like Nature Made Me": Medically Unnecessary Surgeries on Intersex Children in the US* (July 25, 2017) <<https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/07/25/i-want-be-nature-made-me/medically-unnecessary-surgeries-intersex-children-us>> (as of July 1, 2021); Am. Psychological Assn., *Answers to Your Questions About Individuals with Intersex Conditions* p. 1.)

³ Nat. Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and HIV-Affected Intimate Partner Violence in 2015* (2016) p. 10.

⁴ Hirschel et al., *A 10-Year Study of the Impact of Intimate Partner Violence Primary Aggressor Laws on Single and Dual Arrest* (2017) *J. of Interpersonal Violence* 1, 19 tbl. 2 (*10-Year Study*).

⁵ Grant et al., *Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey* (2011) p. 158 (Injustice); see Goodmark, *Transgender People, Intimate Partner Abuse, and the Legal System* (2013) 48 *Harv. C.R.-C.L. L.Rev.* 51, 78-79 ("Transgender people are disproportionately involved in the court system, particularly the criminal justice system. A 2011 survey found that 17% of transgender people had been incarcerated at some point in their lives; 21% of transgender women and 10% of transgender men reported being incarcerated. Transgender people of color have been especially affected by the ever-increasing trend toward incarceration in the United States.") (*Transgender People*).

⁶ See U.S. Dept. of J., *Identifying and Preventing Gender Bias in Law Enforcement Response to Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence* (2016) p. 8 (Gender Bias).

⁷ Greenberg, *Still Hidden in the Closet: Trans Women and Domestic Violence* (2012) 27 *Berkeley J. of Gender L. & J.* 198, 230-232 (*Still Hidden*).

⁸ Hirschel et al., *A 10-Year Study of the Impact of Intimate Partner Violence Primary Aggressor Laws on Single and Dual Arrest* (2017) 36 *J. of Interpersonal Violence* 1, 28 (*10-Year Study*).

⁹ *Id.* p. 28.; Greenberg, *Still Hidden, supra*, 27 *Berkeley J. of Gender L. & J.* at p. 230.

¹⁰ Greenberg, *Still Hidden, supra*, 27 *Berkeley J. of Gender L. & J.* at p. 214, 230-234; Goodmark, *Transgender People, supra*, 48 *Harv. C.R.-C.L. L.Rev.* at pp. 72-74.

¹¹ Goodmark, *Transgender People, supra*, 48 *Harv. C.R.-C.L. L.Rev.* at p. 99.

¹² *Ibid.*; see Duke & Davidson, *Same-Sex Intimate Partner Violence: Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Affirmative Outreach and Advocacy* (2009) *J. of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma* 795, 801-802.

¹³ See Grant et al., *Injustice*, *supra*, at p. 98; Courvant & Cook-Daniels, *Trans and Intersex Survivors of Domestic Violence: Defining Terms, Barriers, & Responsibilities* (1998) p. 3 (Trans and Intersex); Note, *Losing Your Children: The Failure to Extend Civil Rights Protections to Transgender Parents* (2017) 85 *George Wash. L.Rev.* 536, 539 (“thirteen percent of transgender individuals reported that judges limited or prevented them from seeing their children because of their gender identity.”).

¹⁴ See Subirana-Malaret et al., *Intersectionality and Sex and Gender-Based Analyses as Promising Approaches in Addressing Intimate Partner Violence Treatment Programs Among LGBT Couples: A Scoping Review* (2019) 5 *Cogent Social Sciences* 1, 3-4; Woulfe & Goodman, *Identity Abuse as a Tactic of Violence in LGBTQ Communities: Initial Validation of the Identity Abuse Measure* (2018) 36 *J. of Interpersonal Violence* 1, 4-5, 13..

¹⁵ See Greenberg, *Still Hidden*, *supra*, 27 *Berkeley J. of Gender L. & J.* at pp. 216-218 (“[T]he LGBT community in their town is small and insular (and the trans community even smaller) . . . the community may discourage disclosure of one’s ‘dirty laundry,’ fearing that it would increase negative perceptions of the LGBT community.”); Goodmark, *Transgender People*, *supra*, 48 *Harv. C.R.-C.L. L.Rev.* at pp. 86-87 (“The court process is a public process. . . . Such exposure can lead to negative reactions from family and friends, discrimination by landlords, employers, and others, and potentially, greater violence.”).

¹⁶ See Greenberg, *Still Hidden*, *supra*, 27 *Berkeley J. of Gender L. & J.* at p. 213 (“The belief that people have a ‘right to know’ the intimate details of a trans person’s medical history is reflected in the courtroom, where judges persist in asking questions about and documenting trans people’s medical histories and the physical state of their genitals in exhaustive detail.”).

¹⁷ See *Evid. Code*, §§ 210 & 350.

¹⁸ See *Fam. Code*, §§ 3011, 3020, 3040 & 3044. To be sure, gender dysphoria is a mental health disorder in the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-V)*. The American Psychiatric Association has clarified “[t]he critical element of gender dysphoria is the presence of *clinically significant distress* associated with the condition.” (*Am. Psychiatric Assn., Gender Dysphoria* (2017) p. 1, italics added.) I have not received this diagnosis.

¹⁹ See, e.g., *Manela v. Superior Court* (2009) 177 *Cal.App.4th* 1139, 1149-1152 (“There is no question that medical records are highly sensitive materials that fall within the scope of the right to privacy.”), citations omitted.

²⁰ Bockting et al., *Adult Development and Quality of Life of Transgender and Gender Nonconforming People* (2016) 23 *Current Opinion in Endocrinology, Diabetes, & Obesity* 188, ___ (author manuscript at pp. 6-7).

²¹ Note, *Losing Your Children*, *supra*, 85 *George Wash. L.Rev.* at p. 557.