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5	The undersigned affirms that this document contains no	Elizabeth A. Brow	
6	Social Security Numbers pursuant to NRS 239B.030	Clerk of Supreme	Court
7	IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF NEVADA		
8	OFFICE OF THE CLERK		
9			
10	IN THE MATTER OF THE		
11	GUARDIANSHIP OF THE PERSON	Supreme Court No. 83443	
ł	AND ESTATES OF C.T.F. AND	District Court Case No. PR-GU-18-67	
12	P.G.S., MINOR PROTECTED	FAST TRACK STATEMENT	
13	PERSONS.		
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15			
16	1. Appellants, Pamela and Michael Lucero, (hereinafter "Lucero's"		
17	or "Appellants") by and through their atternay. Dahra M. Amona Ess. of Amona		
18	or "Appellants"), by and through their attorney, Debra M. Amens, Esq. of Amens		
19	Law, Ltd., hereby files this Fast Track Statement.		
20	2. Appellant's Attorney contact information is:		
21	2. Appendix 5 Amorney contact information is.		
22	Debra M. Amens, Esq.		
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26			
27	3. Appellant Attorney and Trial Attorney are the same.		
28	4. Lower court proceedings occurred in the Fourth Judicial District		
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Court in and for the County of Elko, Department 1; Case #: PR-GU-18-67. Cases PR-GU-18-49 (Ferguson Guardianship) and PR-GU-18-56 (McGrew Guardianship) were heard together with the case being appealed.

- 5. The Honorable District Court Judge, Kriston N. Hill, presided and issued the final order.
- 6. This appeal followed a hearing on a *Petition for the Appointment* of General Guardians held first on August 5, 2020, and concluded on March 4, 2021. The hearing lasted approximately three (3) days, where the Parties, through their respective counsels, took and gave testimony and made argument. A temporary Co-Guardianship between all of the Petitioners was put into place *pendente lite* in June 2018 whereby the minor protected persons lived one week with the Luceros and their biological mother and then were divided and lived one week with their respective paternal grandparents.
- 7. This appeal is based on the Findings of Facts and Order Granting Guardianship entered on May 13, 2021 where the Court appointed, now Respondents', MARIA and JOHN MCGREW (hereinafter "McGrews"), as Guardians over PAISLEY GRACE STONE (hereinafter "Paisley"), born on May 26, 2016 and Respondents', VICKIE and DONALD FERGUSONS (hereinafter "Fergusons"), as Guardians over CARTAR THOMAS FERGUSON (hereinafter "Cartar"). Paisley and Cartar collectively will be referred to as minor protected

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persons.

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8. Appellants and the biological Mother were awarded only supervised visitation with the minor protected children as prescribed by the Guardians and these requests are being denied. Mother and Appellants have seen Paisley for one (1) hour at her kindergarten graduation in June 2021, and have had only three (3) video visits since the District Court order.

- 9. The time for the filing the Notice of the Appeal was tolled by a filing of a Motion listed in NRAP 4(a)(4):
- a. Motion for Reconsideration, filed June 7, 2021 and mailed out via first class mail.
- b. Notice of Entry of Order denying Motion for Reconsideration was filed on August 20, 2021.
  - 10. The Notice of the Appeal was filed on August 24, 2021.
- 11. NRAP 4(a)(4)(D) governs the time limit for filing the Notice of the Appeal.
- 12. The State of Nevada's Constitution grants jurisdiction to this Court to hear the appeal in Article 6, Section 4 (1).
- 13. There are no prior or other pending proceedings in this Court involving these parties. This present appeal, Supreme Court No. 83443 is the only proceeding presently before the court involving the Parties herein.

### 14. Proceedings raising the same issues.

Appellant is unaware of current pending cases involving the same issues raised in this case. However, Appellants are aware that the biological Mother has petitioned the on-going Guardianships actions in the 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Court Cases PR-GU-18-49 (Ferguson Guardianship) and PR-GU-18-56 (McGrew Guardianship) be terminated.

## 15. Procedural History.

On April 18, 2018 and April 20, 2018 respectively, the Fergusons and the McGrews, by and through their attorney, Travis Gerber, Esq. of Gerber Law Office, each filed a Petition for Guardianship. The McGrews filed to be appointed Guardians for Paisley, in Case No. PR-GU-18-56; and, the Fergusons filed to be appointed Guardians for Carter, in Case No. PR-GU-18-49. With their Petitions they included a Consent from the Natural Mother, Kristin Stone (hereinafter "Mother"). (A-1, A-2, A3)

After signing the consent in the attorney's office, the Fergusons and McGrews, put Mother on a bus to California.

The Luceros, the previous Guardians and Grandparents of Mother, were not consulted prior to the paternal grandparents' actions, despite both minor protected persons primarily residing in the Luceros home since their birth. The Luceros, after retrieving Mother from California, filed an *Ex Parte* Emergency Petition for

Temporary Guardianship on May 22, 2018 (A-4). The Luceros filed their own Petition for General Guardianship of both children on May 22, 2018, in Case No. PR-GU-18-67 (A-5). The Court held a brief hearing on June 6, 2018, and granted a temporary shared Guardianship of the minor protected persons between the Luceros and the McGrews over Paisley; and, a shared Guardianship of the minor protected persons between the Luceros and the Ferguson's over Carter. (C-1) The Court appointed Michelle Rodriquez, Esq. to represent the children's interest.

The majority of the time since the 2018 initial hearing, the parties have exchanged the children on a week-on/week-off basis. A week where the siblings were together with the Luceros and their Mother and then a week where Paisley was with the McGrews and Carter was with the Fergusons (*C-1*). In June 2020, based on bruising and disclosures by Paisley to her counselor, the Lucero's filed an *Ex Parte* Emergency Motion to Suspend Exchanges on June 18, 2020 (*A-8*). Exchanges were stopped temporarily with Paisley and then resumed on the week-on/week-off rotation in August 2020 with a condition of no spanking by Ms. McGrew, following the August 6, 2020 hearing (See Transcript 2, page 368-370 cited as *TR2p368-370*).

Since the grant of temporary co-Guardianship, the Court has been trying to complete an evidentiary hearing which, almost three (3) years later was concluded finally on March 4, 2021, with a new judge presiding. Judge Hill requested that,

 in lieu of closing arguments, each attorney present a proposed order and visitation plan. (A-10) The Court also requested that Mother provide the Court with a letter outlining her wishes following the hearing, this was filed on March 26, 2021 (A-9). The Court also requested documents from the Division of Child and Family Service in regards to the Parties that were reviewed "in-camera" following the close of the hearing (C-3).

A final Order was issued on May 24, 2021, granting McGrews general guardianship over Paisley and Ferguson's general guardianship over Cartar (*E-1*). It provided for unspecified, supervised visitation by Mother and the Luceros at the guardians discretion. (*Id.*)

On June 7, 2021, the Luceros filed a Motion for Reconsideration (A-10). The Court denied the Motion on July 21, 2021. The Order denying the Motion was not provided to the Luceros' but upon receiving the order, Luceros filed a Notice of Entry of Order on August 20, 2021 (Jii-2). Luceros filed their Notice of Appeal with the court on August 24, 2021 (I-1).

### 16. Statement of Facts.

Paisley and Cartar had lived with the Luceros' since their birth as their Mother was mostly living with the Luceros. *Tr3p162* The minor protected persons are closely bonded with the Lucero family. At the start of this Guardianship, the situation between the Parties was very different. Mother was 19 years old and had

two (2) children. Tr1p151 Paisley was two (2) years old and had lost her Father, TJ McGrew to suicide on the date of her 1st birthday. Tr3p149 This death was hard on Mother and Paisley (and frankly on all of the Parties). Mother had then entered into a relationship, with Kevin Ferguson, who is the Father of Cartar. Both Fathers were known to have substance abuse issues and Mother was introduced to these drugs through these relationships. Tr3p18 The relationship with Kevin was turbulent with him away in jail much of the time and Mother was left caring for both children. TR1p154 Being young and needing help she mostly relied on the Luceros and her side of the family including her Mother, Shawn. Trlp151 The children were always well cared for but the Luceros were not tolerant of Mother's involvement with any drugs and her being gone for long periods of time. TR3p163 Mother and the Luceros had a period of time when there was conflict. Tr2p302 The Luceros had been Mother's guardians and Mother has been challenged with a learning disability. Tr3p101 Mother was dealing with significant loss after Paisley's father died, she was young, just over 18, and the realization that being a Mother of two (2) young children (one being an infant) was a full-time job, especially with no partner to share in the responsibility. In her words, she 'panicked' and 'freaked out'. Tr3p37 Mother sought to get help from the paternal grandparents, who had been involved on the periphery, especially the McGrews who did not believe Paisley was their granddaughter until she was 8 or 9 months old. Tr2p326

Seeking respite and avoidance of conflict with the Luceros, Mother asked if the McGrews and Ferguson's would care for the children while she left to put her thoughts in order. Tr3p37 This was a low point for Mother. Id. at p38 Prior to the death of Paisley's father, Mother had been doing well and holding down two (2) different jobs. Tr3p148. In exchange for asking for a respite, the McGrews and Ferguson's demanded that Mother sign paperwork consenting to a temporary guardianship but explaining it to her (in their attorney's office) that it was only so that they could obtain medical assistance if needed during her absence. Tr3p39 There were seven (7) other people including the attorney in the room. *Id.* They jointly assured her 'that they would never take the children from her'. testified that she signed the consent under significant pressure (duress) and that she did not understand that they were seeking anything beyond permission to get medical help for the children if required while she was gone. *Id.* She testified that she ask the attorney, ". .over and over what is this that I'm signing and what does it mean?" Id. He told her "it was nothing but a paper, that if I was not there, that they can still get medical care for my babies". Id.

Worse yet, the McGrews and the Fergusons, then took Mother to the train station and put her on a train to Stockton, California, and paid her between \$40 - 20.

Tr3p40, Tr1p156 The explanation provided was that the McGrews and the Fergusons were only doing what Mother had asked for; but the reality is that Mother

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was grieving, confused, and seeking respite. If they had inquired, they would have learned that she knew no one in Stockton, California, nor did she have a viable plan or know anyone living there. Tr3p40 Both families knew that Mother was not in her right mind and/or understanding the situation given the significant stress she was under. The McGrews and the Fergusons, took advantage of Mother at a vulnerable time and then they took her children.

No one has claimed that at that moment, the children were in poor shape or that Mother was incapable of caring for the children. In fact, while she admits to being under significant stress and panicked – she first arranged for her children to be well cared for. Tr3p38-39. Mother testified that she had been providing for their needs and was just seeking some time off to get her head straight. The Luceros' became aware of all of this activity when a woman, they did not know, called them from Stockton, California, to tell them that their Granddaughter was sleeping in her The Luceros' traveled to Stockton and retrieved Mother, garage. Tr3p140 returning her to Elko. Tr3p40 That is when they learned of the Guardianship and Mother's supposed 'consent' to it. Mother indicated that she was pressured to sign it and that she wanted her children back in the care of Luceros. Tr3p41 Mother tried to revoke her consent to the McGrews and Fergusons upon her return. Id. The Luceros then filed for guardianship to bring the children home.

The drama of how these competing guardianships got started is important here, because it relates to why the Luceros have lingering resentment, especially to the McGrews, who they felt had orchestrated the ploy. *Tr3p140* The Luceros see the initial actions, not as being done for the best interest of the minor protected persons or for Mother's well-being, but rather as a blatant attempt to take the children from Mother and to physically remove her from the area.

Mother seeing the temporary Guardianship granted and not having the burden of child care, and being frustrated with the conflict between the grandparents, then withdrew and stayed away. *Tr3p44*. She started a new relationship and in early 2020 gave birth to another girl, Mayce, with a new Father. *Tr3p49-50* Now, with the responsibility again to raise a child, Mother settled down and with the Lucero's assistance, is caring for this child. In March 2021, she had been living with the Luceros for several months and was pregnant again. *Id*. The Father of Mayce and the new one, is an involved father, and now providing Mother with financial and emotional support. They just had their second child together, another girl, Annabelle, born on May 29, 2021. (*A-11*)

Mother is sober and is doing well. Testimony from both professionals involved in the case, Paisley's counselor, Geri Goddard, and the family advocate, Janell Anderson, indicated that the objective in regards to the minor protected persons should be to reunify them with Mother. *Tr3p15*, *Tr3p63* Mother is bonded

with all of her children and the District Court heard testimony about how close both Paisley and Cartar are to their little sister, Mayce. *Tr3p45*, *Trp61*, *Trp93* Given the final Guardianship order (*E-1*) Paisley has only briefly met her new baby sister, Annabelle, and Cartar has not met his new little sister. In fact, as provided to the District Court, there has been almost no visitation between the Luceros or Mother with Paisley and Cartar since May because of denials for visitation by Ms. McGrew who has demanded that all requests for visits be sent to her (including visits with Cartar. (*H-2*) This despite the McGrews indicating to the Court that the Luceros and Mother would have regular visitation. *Tr2p337* 

The three (3) year temporary Co-Guardianship has allowed Mother time to mature and the minor protected persons to get to know their paternal grandparents. Testimony was provided that the parenting styles between, especially the Luceros and McGrews, was significantly different and that it was causing stress for specifically, Paisley. *Tr3p10*, *Tr3p61* Ms. Goddard, testified that the exchanges were difficult for Paisley and that while she was benefitting from contact with both sets of Grandparents, her perceived home was with the Luceros. *Tr3p61* It was the Counselor's concern with the use of a 'spanking spoon' and bruising on Paisley along with the child's disclosures to both the Counselor and the Division of Child and Family ("DCFS") Investigator, Brenda Kelley-Brace, that led to brief pause in the week-on/week-off exchange schedule and a direct order from the Court that all

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such physical discipline cease.(C-2) Sadly, the DCFS investigator never even interviewed the Counselor who the child had also disclosed to but instead interviewed the McGrew's pastor. Tr1p58 Ms. Goddard testified that Paisley repeatedly disclosed that Ms. McGrew (specifically) was "mean" to her and angry with her. Tr2p200

The Lucero's were actively involved in meeting the needs of Paisley and getting outside help from medical providers (the Pediatrician and Dietician) and for Carter (through NEIS and the Shriner's Hospital). *TR3p85-91*, *Tr3p97-98* The District Court has expressed concern that this occurred just prior to the March 2021 hearing, when it had been scheduled for months and the actual appointment was in January 2021. (A-11) While they acknowledged difficulty in the relationship with the McGrews, they were fond of all of the parties; and there was evidence where Ms. McGrew and Ms. Lucero were able to cooperate for the benefit of Paisley: a joint visit to the Pediatrician *Tr3p85*; telephone calls about Paisley's braid being cut off, flowers being delivered on Mother's day *Tr2p250*, etc.

In the Lucero proposed order, as was directed by the District Court, the Luceros provided a proposed visitation plan for the children to maintain the bond build during this temporary guardianship. (A-10) No real plan was provided in the final order. (E-1)

Mother has participated in the majority of every guardianship hearing and has repeatedly asked that the children be returned to her care and if not left with the Lucero's. Mother submitted a letter to the Court per Request of Judge. (A-9). The only other available parent is Kevin Ferguson, Cartar's dad, who attended one (1) hearing. At the hearing, Vickie Ferguson was testifying about how good Kevin was doing now that he was sober and living with them. A drug test was requested and Kevin tested positive for Methamphetamine, indicating his drug use was continuing despite several criminal charges and time in jail, and that his Grandmother, Vickie, was unable to discern when he was high. Tr1p173 Vickie is not healthy and struggles to be able to even pick up the child and is using oxygen at all times. Tr2p254-255

On the first day of the the 3-day hearing, the District Court spent a significant amount of time on possible Attorney conflicts and how to handle a document from a five(5) year old closed 432B case and a subpoena issued without but notice to opposing counsel. Tr1p121-135. Then on the last day, the child's attorney requested another in-camera review of the complete DCFS files as to any of the parties. Despite appellants' objective expressing hearsay and due process concerns, the District Court agreed and ordered that such documents be produce for her eyes only. Tr3p172 - 180. This review only affected the Luceros, per Respondent's witness from DCFS, Lori Morehead who testified that there were no other records

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27 28 for the other guardians (except the spanking spoon incident), only reports for the Luceros. Tr1p101 The lack of findings in the final order (especially as to the children's best interest) make it unclear how much bias against the Luceros was included in the reviewed record – bias which the Luceros were unable to address other than pointing out that DCFS repeatedly placed children back in their care. (E-1) The Court did make a finding that the Luceros lied to law enforcement, when that was not supported in the record, and vehemently denied. The Courtalso states that Ms Lucero was convicted of various crimes, which also was not supported in the record, other than a crime occurring over 50 years ago (and not involving children). Tr3p153 Ms. Lucero testified that she has never even spent a night in jail. Id. The Court did refer to a Bankruptcy that the Luceros had gone through, and disclosed in their Petition, but that was over seven (7) years ago and due to crushing medical debt associated with a horse riding accident. Id.

How much of the errors included in the Court order are attributed to the review of a banker box worth of material – all hearsay is unclear, but the Order, as written, also does not adequately address the best interest of the minor children, and needs to be overturned.

#### **17. Issues on Appeal**

Whether the District Court erred in allowing for an incamera review of the complete DCFS file which includes staff notes and impressions without allowing for the parties to be

adequately heard on the issues raised?

- B. Whether the District Court failed to consider the children's best interest when it decided to divide the children into two separate homes without any plan for sibling contact with each other or the two other siblings being raised by Mother.
- C. Whether the District Court's accurately determined whether the Lucero's interest were adequately protected by allowing both the Respondent's attorney and the children's attorney to stay on the case despite previous involvement in cases involving the Luceros
- 18. Legal Argument, including authorities.
- A. Whether the District Court erred in allowing for an incamera review of the complete DCFS file which includes staff notes and impressions without allowing for the parties to be adequately heard on the issues raised?

Hearsay is defined as is an out-of-court statement offered to provide the truth of whatever [A1]it asserts and is typically not allowed to be used as evidence in a trial. There are exceptions but none that apply herein. The DCFS records are clearly hearsay and in this case, despite appellates' counsel objection, the Court reviewed these files (a whole banker boxfull) without any ability for Appellants to respond. This was kind of 'secret' hearsay and to the extent it had any impact whatsoever in the final order – this review was wrong and patently unfair to the Luceros. While it was indicated that this review would apply to all of the proposed guardians – the DCFS manager that testified had already indicated that only the Luceros had files FAST TRACK STATEMENT - 15

other than the one instance the McGrews had an investigation based on the spanking incident involving Paisley by Ms. McGrew.

The in camera review and lack of reporting out, robbed the Lucero's of a meaningful right of due process protected both in the Nevada and US Constitution.

B. Whether the District Court failed to consider the children's best interest when it decided to divide the children into two separate homes without any plan for sibling contact with each other or the two other siblings being raised by Mother.

NRS 159A.061 provides that the parents of a proposed protected minor, or either parent, if qualified and suitable, are preferred over all others for appointment as guardian for the person or estate or person and estate of the proposed protected minor.

Here, we had a situation that upon the grant of a temporary guardianship a need for the guardianship existed even as shown in Mother's consents to both sets of grandparents in order for her to head straight. Then evidence was provided that the minor protected persons were no longer in need of a guardianship because Mother was sober; acting responsibly; and, able to care for her other child, her significant other's child and was taking care of her unborn child. The two professionals involved in the case, both advocated for the guardianship's focus to change on supporting Mother to be able to take custody of her children. Likewise, the Luceros' advocated for the same; and, presented the only Guardianship option FAST TRACK STATEMENT - 16

 that would allow Mother to move into a full custody arrangement and keep the siblings together.

The court did not address this, nor the other best interest factors outlined by the Nevada legislature; and in fact, seemed to believe that a grant of guardianship to the paternal grandparents would resolve the conflict between the Parties. The Court, apparently, relied on the direct testimony of both Ms. McGrew and Ms. Ferguson, that visitations between Mother and the Luceros with the children would be liberally granted. No such visitation has occurred (as the Court was advised in the Motion for Reconsideration) and the conflict is higher than ever. Only the Lucero's offered a plan to ensure the other grandparents remained bonded with the children. This Court regularly requires a District Court to make specific best interest findings and the District Court, here, failed to make such findings in its order.

C. Whether the District Court's accurately determined whether the Lucero's interest were adequately protected by allowing both the Respondent's attorney and the children's attorney to stay on the case despite previous involvement in cases involving the Luceros

The Court in Waid v. 8<sup>th</sup> Judicial Dist. Ct., adopted a three-part test to determine if a former and present matter are substantially related:

"(1) make a factual determination concerning the scope of the former representation, (2) evaluate whether it is reasonable to infer that the confidential information allegedly given would have been

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given to a lawyer representing a client in those matters, and (3) determine whether that information is relevant to the issues raised in the present litigation."

Waid v. Dist. Ct., 119 P.3d 1219, 121 Nev. 605 (2005)

Here, Judge Porter looked at Waid and determined that the Juvenile case handled by Attorney Gerber was not substantially related and yet his representation of their grandson, who the Lucero's were raising, and its companion 432B case, set the tenor of the trial and were the basis of the inquiry into DCFS actions against the Luceros. Similarly, Attorney Rodriguez's involvement in the 432B actions and investigations also illicited the requested 'in camera' review of DCFS unity notes and files. The fact that DCFS staff were bias against the Luceros' was evident in just how the DCFS investigator spent time talking about how chaotic the Lucero's home was in comparison to the McGrews home when there was actually only 2 less people at the McGrews home (7 vs. 5); and, how instead of talking with the mandatory reporter of Paisley's injury, the investigator chose to speak with the McGrew's pastor. To really address the issues raised in Attorney Gerber's previous juvenile case would have required putting the alleged victim (who has recanted her story) and his client on the stand. The attorneys' involvement in the past, made this a trial not about Paisley and Cartar's best interest but instead became a new trial on past allegations against the Luceros' with the Luceros' being unable to adequately defend themselves.

The Luceros believe the finding that the attorneys involved were not FAST TRACK STATEMENT - 18

conflicted was an error and not a harmless error.

### 19. Issues of First Impression or of important public interest.

Issues of Conflict of Interest are always of important public interest and in this case, Appellant's believe that the conflicts so inflicted the case, that the children did not receive neutral representation, and unfairly tilted the case away from the important issue at hand – the best interest of the minor protected persons.

Several witnesses commented how similar this actions was to a custody battle and yet the same requirement for specific findings as to the best interest of the children are not present in the District Courts' order. Appellants believe the Court's requirement of the same in custody matters should also apply to contested guardianships of minors.

While NRS Chapter 432B allows for an in camera review of confidential documents, to not provide a report out of the Court's conclusion based on the review, fundamentally and unfairly affected Appellants due process rights and needs this Court's attention to right a wrong.

# 20. Statement of Assignment

Appellants believe that this case should be heard by the Nevada Court of Appeals because while involving a guardianship it is most similar to a Family law case pursuant to NRAP Rule 17(b)(10).

### VERIFICATION

- 1. I hereby certify that this fast track statement complies with the formatting requirements of NRAP 32(a)(4), the typeface requirements of NRAP 32(a)(5), and the type style requirements of NRAP 32(a)(6) because this statement has been prepared in a proportionally spaced typeface using Microsoft Word 2013 in Times New Roman font in 14 point font size.
- 2. I further certify that this fast track statement complies with the page or type volume limitations of NRAP 3E(e)(2) because it is proportionally spaced and contains 4648 words.
- 3. Finally, I recognize that under NRAP 3E I am responsible for timely filing a fast track statement and that the Supreme Court of Nevada may impose sanctions for failing to timely file a fast track or failing to raise issues or arguments in the fast track statement. I therefore certify that the information provided in this fast track statement is true and complete to the best of my knowledge, information and belief.

DATED this 25 day of October, 2021.

AMENS LAW, Ltd.

Debra M. Amens, Esq. Nevada Bar No. 12681

Attorney for Appellants