

Patricia M. Cole, M.D.

P.O. Box 256 • Lakeside • Montana • 59922
(406) 252-0476 office • (406) 270-2405 mobile

October 12, 2005

Re: Sondra Haywood
DOB: 12/13/98

To Whom It May Concern:

I have practiced as a family physician educator for 28 years in Minnesota. I directed family practice residency training programs for 20 years, and now live and work in the Flathead Valley of Montana. I have known Sondra Haywood since she moved to Montana in the fall of 2004. The purpose of this letter is to convey my observations prior to and following her four-week summer trip to Denver, Colorado in June of 2005.

Sondra is an attractive blonde haired, blue-eyed child. She is slightly built and a picky eater. She is an extraordinarily bright child and sensitive child, as evidenced by her capacity to produce detailed drawings and construct elaborate structures with toys and found objects. She appears to have an advanced ability to conceptualize. She is thriving here in Montana. Generally a happy child, comfortable around her immediate Montana family members, she is initially shy and reserved around strangers. She is quite self-possessed, and plays comfortably by herself in the midst of gatherings of people. Her behavior is polite and contained. She listens attentively to her father and grandmother, and complies willingly with their instructions.

Prior to her trip to Denver, Colorado in June, 2005 I saw her exhibit anxiety symptoms, in that she was more clinging to her father and grandmother than usual, and reluctant to be away from them. I had not seen this behavior previously. Sondra stated verbally many times that she did not want to go to Denver, and was clearly reluctant to leave Montana. I heard that she had some disturbing dreams prior to her trip.

When she returned from Denver, after four weeks away I was astonished to see how wan, withdrawn and sad she was. She appeared to have lost weight, spoke very little, and appeared sad and subdued. I rode with her in a car immediately after her trip. She sat in her car seat in the back and spoke barely two words during an hour trip. Her usually chatty responses were absent. She had very little appetite, even for foods she had previously enjoyed. This withdrawn behavior lasted more than a week, gradually subsiding as her grandmother spent considerable time cuddling her, reassuring her and eating meals with her. Her father also attended to her affectionately and supportively.

Gradually over the summer, I noticed that Sondra was talking cheerfully about her activities, and subsequently she has returned to being the happy child she was prior to her time away. She appears to have regained her appetite and regained lost weight. She appears happy and well adjusted as a first grader at school. Sondra likes her new teacher,

Patricia M. Cole, M.D.

P.O. Box 286 - Lakeside - Montana - 59922
(406) 752-0476 office • (406) 270-2405 mobile

a pleasant and smiling woman who routinely walks with her after school out to meet family members who pick her up to drive her home. Sondra enjoys showing us her homework.

It appears to me that Sondra was traumatized by her extended trip to Denver. Despite the efforts of her Montana family to support her prior, during and after the trip, the extended visit clearly took an unfortunate toll on her. I know that her father and his brother's family who live in Denver tried to mitigate her stress. Sondra told me that she enjoyed seeing her cousins in Denver and staying for a few days with them at their home. However, I can only conclude that the time she spent with her biological mother was deeply disturbing to her. It was so disturbing and unsettling for her, it outweighed the positive influences the rest of the family tried to create for her. I can only recommend against putting her through such trauma again.

Sondra is clearly thriving in Montana living with her father, in close proximity to her grandmother, aunt and baby cousin. This extended family offers her the emotional support she needs, as well as the intellectual stimulation which brings out her best. Not only is she getting a good conventional education, but I see her grandmother educating her about music, encouraging her creative and artistic expressions as well as seeing to it that her hair and wardrobe are befitting this lovely child. It is my pleasure to witness their united love, protection and commitment to her welfare.

If you need further information from me please do not hesitate to contact me. My mailing address is P.O. Box 286, Lakeside, MT, 59922. I can also be reached on my cell phone which is 406 270-2405.

Sincerely,

Patricia M. Cole MD
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