

Midway woman alleges LDS leader had her involuntarily committed

Caleb Warnock
DAILY HERALD

On June 3, outspoken child advocate Connie Fielding, of Midway, was taken by her LDS stake president to a hospital for involuntary commitment to a lockdown psych ward. She was released 18 days later when, because of the outcry of her friends, her case garnered national attention from a group called Lawless America and a volunteer lawyer took her case before a judge, who ordered her release.

At noon on June 3, Fielding met with her stake president in his office. Within 30 minutes, she was being driven to the McKay-Dee Hospital in Ogden, two hours away. By 2:30 p.m., court papers show, Fielding, 51, was "involuntarily committed" to the hospital's psychiatric unit.

When asked if stake presidents are often involved in involuntarily committing church members to psych units, a spokeswoman for the LDS Church said the stake president was simply giving Fielding a ride.

Fielding is a grandmother who holds nothing back while expressing her disgust for judges who strip mothers of custody of their children based on accusations from ex-husbands.

"We have corrupt judges," Fielding said. "The entire guardian ad litem's office is corrupted. They are ripping kids from good Mormon moms and giving them to dads whom they have just reported for sexually molesting the kids, and there is nothing the moms can do about it because it has been ordered by a corrupt judge. I'm a whistleblower. How many single moms have they locked up and taken their kids away? How many single moms are now drugged up and in a corner in a psych unit?"

Fielding is the mother of four. Her divorce in 1996 set off a legal custody battle that lasted for years.

"I escaped domestic violence," she said. "There is a father's rights movement. They don't really want the kids. They want to take them from the moms and they don't want to pay child support, and these are bad dads with records of violence and abuse. They get in front of a corrupt judge and a corrupt guardian ad litem and they all go in with the bias that the mom is horrible and they take the kids from the mom. My ex sued me three times and destroyed me financially."

Fielding says she now believes that God wanted her to experience her years of legal fighting so she could spend her life advocating for mothers who are wrongful victims.

"It is my mission," she said. "God wanted me to see all of it and I was directed and led by the spirit. These women get no due process rights. You never get your kids back once they are taken. This is organized crime."

She has been diagnosed with post traumatic stress disorder stemming from her divorce and she is not known for polite censoring of her feelings or accusations. Many mothers are unfairly being removed from their children by the courts, and the victims are not being heard, she said.

Bill Windsor travels the country for the Lawless America program, interviewing people who allege they are victims of the government and judges.

"I came to Ogden to film Connie's story and en route I was notified she had been committed to this mental facility because she believed there was a problem with the family court system," Windsor said in a segment filmed outside McKay-Dee Hospital after a judge ordered Fielding's release. "Well, those who follow Lawless America know that is not a psychotic belief. That is a fact. The family court, the children and family situation in our country, is a disaster, and Connie just happens to be a whistleblower, an outspo-

ken whistleblower about this. She is very much a leader in the northern part of Utah in regard especially to children and family court issues but also court corruption issues in general."

The state auditor's office has met with Fielding and members of her group. Fielding said she gave a presentation about corruption among state child welfare workers and judges.

"My investigators met with her but she was unable to provide us any actionable information," State Auditor John Dougall told the Daily Herald. "They also met with one of her associates with similar results. We welcome specific information regarding incidents of fraud, malfeasance or misconduct within any part of state or local government."

Fielding said she met several times over the past year with Elder L. Whitney Clayton, who is a member of the LDS Church's Presidency of the Seventy, and Elder Bradley D. Foster, who is a member of the Second Quorum of the Seventy.

"We went there to ask them to consider policy changes for single moms," she said. "I had an open door with Elder Clayton."

Fielding said she wanted the church to discipline members whom she alleges are corrupt and purposefully "giving kids to bad dads."

When asked to confirm the appointments, LDS Church spokeswoman Ruth Todd said, "We are not privy to nor do we provide details about personal appointments of our church leaders."

Mike Nelson, who oversees the Midway, Utah, LDS Stake, was Fielding's stake president. Fielding had been evicted from her rental home. Her LDS stake was paying for a motel room. Her youngest son, Tanner, had just graduated from high school five days earlier, and Fielding had lost her job the same week.

Meeting with her stake president on June 3, Fielding



Connie Fielding was involuntarily admitted to a hospital by her LDS stake president.

Courtesy photo

said she thought the meeting was about finding permanent housing. Instead, her stake president offered to provide some medical treatment, based on prior discussions.

"The church is going to help you," she recalled her stake president telling her in the meeting. "I need a hysterectomy and back surgery and I'm sitting there in his office crying because I'm so grateful. But then he said the only way the church is going to help you is if you go right now to get a three-day medical physical. That didn't make sense to me."

Fielding said she began to ask questions, but she was told that in order for the LDS Church to pay the medical bills, procedures would need to be done at McKay-Dee Hospital. Fielding said she offered to drive herself to the doctor, but Nelson refused, telling her that he had to personally admit her because he was arranging payment. Nelson was trying to convince Fielding that she and her son were now homeless and the government would come to get her if they knew, according to Fielding.

"He was kind about it," she said of the stake president. "He was manipulating me. He made it sound like he was caring for me."

After arriving at the hospital, Fielding said Nelson took her to the emergency entrance. Fielding said she had no idea that she was being admitted involuntarily to a psych unit until she was informed by a doctor in an examining room. She was then taken to a lockdown facility.

According to court documents, Fielding was "involuntarily committed" to the psych unit after she "was brought to the emergency department by a religious leader concerned for her health and mental stability. She was evaluated by the crisis worker and admitted to psychiatry. Since admitted to psychiatry, the affiant (a crisis worker) has received phone calls from various family members and friends who describe a history of delusional preoccupation with government conspiracies to take children from their homes and give them to bad people. Resources have expressed their concern for her well-being and

for others, as Connie has stated that it is her 'mission from Christ' to expose these conspiracies. Resources indicate that she has made references to hurting others, 'I have guns and I'm going to need them.' 'People will have to grieve before they can heal.' When told she was going to be filed on for commitment, she told the affiant 'You will be excommunicated for this' referring to membership in the LDS Church. 'I have been in touch with Elder Holland and he will not stand for this. Where are you getting your marching orders from? Are you getting a bonus on the side for this? Shame on you.'"

Fielding told the Daily Herald that she never uttered the sentence about guns and has never owned a gun. Windsor, in his reporting on Fielding's case, called the words about a gun "a standard statement" of supporters of the National Rifle Association, which is not grounds for psychiatric commitment. Fielding said the sentence about grieving was taken from a text message from her to her stake president sent the day before as part of a conversation about the behavior of her 18-year-old son, Tanner, who is preparing to serve a church mission. She said the court papers make it clear that there never was a legal standing for her commitment and that she is exploring a lawsuit. Fielding said she has no history of mental illness and she feels her stake president kidnapped her.

On Thursday, Fielding said she got a \$36,600 bill from the psych ward for her "involuntary commitment."

Nelson, the stake president, confirmed to the Daily Herald that he and a member of his presidency drove Fielding to the hospital and checked her in.

"She asked to be driven and so I got my counselor and we went," he said. "She described where she wanted to go. She has a son named Tanner that was just going through graduation that week. Tanner ran away the night before and had run away several times. Our interest is in Tanner and her."

Nelson said he was not comfortable discussing the rest of what happened because of the confidential nature of discus-

sions between church members and lay clergy.

Todd, the church spokeswoman, said the stake president only gave Fielding a ride.

"She asked the president if he would drive her, and she had a specific hospital she wanted to go to," Todd said. "He did not go to the admittance desk. I do know that he was not even there and was not involved in any admittance paperwork. He didn't sign anything or pay for anything. He couldn't legally admit her against her will, and he did not help admit her, except to give her the ride she requested to the hospital."

"Connie is a brilliant person," Nelson told the Daily Herald. "My interest still continues to be that she gets what she needs. She is a very bright, talented woman and has just had a lot of turmoil. I guess I can say that without disclosing any confidentiality."

Fielding is part of a support group of mothers who believe they have unfairly lost custody of their children. The group meets in person and online to help each other and advocate for change. The Daily Herald spoke to several women in the group who said Fielding is far from psychotic and is in fact being targeted for her outspoken stance.

Vanessa Nelson has her own story about an ex-husband and a fight over children.

"We have a group of us mothers who are all in the court system whose ex-husbands are using the kids as their weapons to get back at us for leaving them," Vanessa Nelson, no relation to Mike Nelson, said. "They are using them to continue the abuse and control over our lives. Everything I made went to attorneys and to pay child support. I was trying to live off \$100 a month, and most of these women are in the same boat. We are desolate. That is part of the pathology of the abuser, to keep us stuck."

The group calls such cases "judicial kidnapping." The women beseech the Legislature at the state capital and implore the media for attention.

"We've done everything we can to expose what is happening to our children," Vanessa Nelson said.



UTAH'S WATER FUTURE

SHARE YOUR IDEAS ABOUT WATER

Utah is the second driest state in the nation. It is also among the fastest growing. That combination presents obvious challenges for how we manage our water. To meet our growing water needs, Governor Herbert is seeking innovative solutions from the public that don't break the bank or dry up our streams—ideas that are a win-win for all Utahns.

THIS SUMMER, WE'RE LISTENING

Help develop Utah's long-term water strategy. Come to a Town Hall Meeting near you.

Thursday, July 18 • 7 to 9 p.m.
Provo High School, Auditorium
1125 N. University Ave., Provo, UT 84604

A public comment period will be followed by breakout sessions on specific areas of focus.

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK

If you can't attend a meeting, submit your ideas online. Please visit www.utahswater.org to share your comments.

Together we can shape the vision of Utah's water future.



heraldextra.com/giveaways

The Daily Herald is Hooking You Up.

Enter weekly to win tickets or gift certificates from local summer favorites!

Enter online at heraldextra.com/giveaways



Use your smartphone or tablet to see this week's giveaway.

UPCOMING PRIZES FROM:



