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Informed Consent for Psychological Custody Evaluation

Dr. William L. Buchanan, a licensed psychologist, has been appointed by Court Order to conduct a Psychological Custody Evaluation (O.C.G.A.19-9-3) regarding you and your family. Dr. Buchanan's purpose in conducting this evaluation is to gather information that will enable him to formulate an impartial professional opinion and make recommendations for your family based on *the best interests of your children*. This will include recommendations for custody and/or visitation.

The process of this Psychological Custody Evaluation actually involves multiple evaluations. This includes an evaluation of each individual in the family as well as an evaluation of the interpersonal relationships between family members. Thus, each parent and every child will undergo their own psychological evaluation which may include psychological testing and several interviews. Dr. Buchanan will also make observations of the interactions between the children and each parent. Thus, all members of the immediate family will need be available to Dr. Buchanan for as many interviews and testing sessions as necessary. If appropriate in your case, step-parents, grandparents, and significant others may also be requested to be interviewed, have their own evaluation, and/or be observed interacting with various family members. The process takes several weeks, and most often months, to complete.

Dr. Buchanan may also request access to additional information from "collateral contacts," including, but not limited to, consultations with teachers, physicians, therapists, grandparents, neighbors, childcare providers, etc. who interact with the members of your family. Both parents will need to sign Release of Information forms before each "collateral contact" is made. Dr. Buchanan is open to making contacts with such individuals, but this will increase the financial costs of the evaluation as well as take additional time, thereby extending the date of when Dr. Buchanan's written report will be issued. Dr. Buchanan will also talk to each attorney and the Guardian Ad Litem (if one is appointed) at his discretion. Please organize and label any materials you submit to Dr. Buchanan for his review. Anything submitted to Dr. Buchanan (e.g., photos, documents, drawings, etc.) will be placed in your case file and will not be returned.

Parents should not coach the children as to what to say to Dr. Buchanan. Parents should not tell or imply that a child should "take sides" in the divorce. Dr. Buchanan should be introduced as "a doctor

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who helps families decide how to handle problems and the children's time with each parent during (or after) a divorce.”

Dr. Buchanan utilizes psychometrists to administer and score the psychological testing. Most often the psychometrists are doctoral students in clinical psychology under his supervision. Dr. Buchanan is totally responsible for the interpretation of the tests and the writing of the final report. During the administration of the psychological testing, no one may accompany you or your child. Spouses, children, parents, companions, etc. can serve as distractions. Dr. Buchanan also wants to get honest and truthful responses and does not want the person being tested to be influenced in any way by another party.

In Psychological Custody Evaluations, Dr. Buchanan functions as an objective and impartial evaluator and not as a therapist. Thus, your interactions with Dr. Buchanan in the role of an individual undergoing a Court ordered Psychological Custody Evaluation will be different than if you were in the role of a patient undergoing therapy with him. Dr. Buchanan does not share his opinions about your case with either party until after the written report has been issued.

The principles of confidentiality and privileged communication are modified when a family participates in a Psychological Custody Evaluation. The general rules of confidentiality still apply to you and your family in that no information will be released to anyone not involved in the court proceedings without your written consent. However, any information obtained during this evaluation can and may be included in the written Psychological Custody Evaluation report and/or discussed with each party, their attorneys, and/or the Judge. Please do not mislead your children by telling them what they say to Dr. Buchanan is confidential, because it is not - it may be included in the custody evaluation report. Furthermore, information obtained from “collateral contacts” is not confidential as it too can be included in the Psychological Custody Evaluation report. If Dr. Buchanan testifies in your case, whether in deposition or on the witness stand, all information he obtained is open to discussion, and none of it is protected as privileged communication.

Although the Court has determined the method of payment for these evaluations and the Court does not pay for Dr. Buchanan's services, Dr. Buchanan will operate as though he is an impartial evaluator employed by the Court, regardless of the method of remuneration.

A separate document, the Psychological Services Contract, reviews Dr. Buchanan's billing policies and fees. However, a few issues are also covered here. Fees are based on services provided, including interviewing, testing, document review, phone conversations, consultation with other professionals, report preparation, etc. *The Psychological Custody Evaluation report will be written and issued only after all bills have been paid in full.* There are also *separate and additional fees* for depositions, court appearances, and consultations after the written report has been issued. Depositions and Court appearances are charged in half day increments at \$1800.00 per half day. Travel costs are additional if more than 25 miles from Dr. Buchanan's office. Fees are charged whether or not Dr. Buchanan actually testifies, since time waiting to testify is time away from the office thereby preventing Dr. Buchanan from seeing other patients and earning income for that period of the work day.

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The profession of psychology has not developed specific methods and procedures used for Psychological Custody Evaluations that are universally accepted. Neither the profession of psychology nor the State of Georgia has established specific criteria for assessment methods in Psychological Custody Evaluations. It should be noted that other psychologists use many of the same methods and procedures, while other psychologists may employ somewhat different methods and procedures. The criteria that Dr. Buchanan utilizes and the methods and procedures he uses have been chosen by him to reflect, in his judgement, a reliable and valid system of collecting the information necessary for a Psychological Custody Evaluation. Dr. Buchanan uses methods and procedures that he has many years of experience using and that address issues he believes are helpful in coming to a reasoned professional opinion regarding what is in the best interests of your children. In the written Psychological Custody Evaluation, Dr. Buchanan will offer the Court conclusions and recommendations that are within a reasonable degree of psychological certainty. However, these conclusions and recommendations are not perfect or infallible but are reasoned professional opinions by a licensed psychologist.

It should be noted that it is impossible to have all the information regarding all individuals in a particular family. Also, not all information is necessary, helpful or relevant in determining what is in the best interests of the children. Dr. Buchanan always tries to balance obtaining necessary, sufficient and useful information vs. completing the report without adding unnecessary additional costs and time. Thus, Dr. Buchanan strives to be pragmatic and balance these issues.

Dr. Buchanan will try to complete the report in a reasonable amount of time. However, no guarantee can be made as to when the written report will be issued. This is because he can not tell in advance how many interviews will be necessary, how flexible the parties' schedules are for scheduling appointments, how many collateral interviews are needed, or how long it takes for Dr. Buchanan to obtain and analyze the information required to come to a reasonable professional opinion about your case.

In most cases, Dr. Buchanan's written report of the Psychological Custody Evaluation of your family will include recommendations regarding living arrangements, legal and physical custody, visitation, and other issues. However, the Court is not obligated to accept any of Dr. Buchanan's recommendations. The written report will be sent to the Judge, all attorneys and the Guardian Ad Litem at approximately the same time unless the Court has ordered another arrangement. If significant time elapses between the issuance of Dr. Buchanan's report and the date of the Court hearing, Dr. Buchanan may request additional interviews and consultations so to be updated of events and circumstances prior to providing testimony.

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Having carefully read this document, and agreeing to the terms and conditions stated above, I hereby give my informed consent to have a Psychological Custody Evaluation to be conducted by William L. Buchanan, Ph.D. and North Point Psychology, LLC, subject to State of Georgia law as specified in O.C.G.A. 19-9-3. I also agree and consent to all of my children participating as required in this Psychological Custody Evaluation.

Childrens' names and dates of birth

Date: _____

Parent's Printed Name

Parent's Signature