

# Judge rules for mother in custody case where dad in Iraq

LAWRENCE (AP) — A custody battle between a Marine stationed in Iraq and his estranged wife may have implications for all Kansas service members who are overseas, according to a lawyer involved in the case.

A Franklin County judge has twice ruled that a federal law meant to protect military personnel from civil litigation does not apply in the custody case between Marine Cpl. Levi Bradley and his estranged wife, Amber Bradley.

Levi Bradley, who has lived in Pomona and Ottawa, filed for divorce in May. When he was deployed to Iraq, he asked for a delay in the custody case over their 2-year-old son.

The Servicemember's Civil Relief Act, signed in 2003, shields

military personnel in Iraq, Afghanistan or other war zones from lawsuits and evictions until they are back in the U.S. The law required judges to postpone judgment for at least 90 days if the service member applies for more time.

Court records show that Levi Bradley and his mother, Starleen Bradley, had legal custody of the child when he was deployed in July. Amber Bradley, the Marine's estranged wife, signed the agreement.

Levi Bradley asked in October — a month before the first child custody hearing was scheduled — to delay further proceedings. The application included a letter from his commanding officer in Iraq and his own testimony, as the law requires.

But on Nov. 8, Franklin County Judge James Smith ruled that the

**“ Senator Brownback feels it’s important that members of our military . . . are not discriminated against simply because they are deployed and unable to represent themselves.”**

Brian Hart,  
spokesperson for Brownback

mother should get custody of the child, saying the federal law didn't apply because the temporary action affected the child, not Levi Bradley himself.

Smith reaffirmed his ruling last week after the Marine's lawyer, Jean Ann Uvodich, filed a motion to reconsider the decision.

“There's really nothing that indicates the law shouldn't apply,” Uvodich told the Lawrence Journal-World.

The attorney for Amber Bradley said a child's fate shouldn't be left in limbo because of a parent's military service.

“The court needs to be able to

decide a child's welfare,” attorney Amy Durkin said.

Levi Bradley's attorney said she expects to hear from the Kansas Court of Appeals this week about the Marine's appeal application.

Uvodich said there is no precedent in Kansas courts for such a case and the outcome will influence the rights of all Kansas service members overseas.

Durkin, the mother's attorney, said that regardless of appeals, the federal law won't supersede the needs of a child.

“It's going to be appealed,” Durkin told the Journal-World. “We'll see then.”

Levi Bradley's mother, Starleen Bradley, attended both custody hearings.

“I couldn't believe the judge said

it,” she said, “when everything we were reading said (the law) applied.” She called Sen. Sam Brownback and Rep. Dennis Moore about the judge's ruling.

“Senator Brownback feels it's important that members of our military — and especially those who are currently serving in the Middle East — are not discriminated against simply because they are deployed and unable to represent themselves in person,” said Brian Hart, Brownback's spokesman. “(He) wants to make sure that the law of the land, as stated in the Civil Relief Act, is not ignored.”

Moore's spokeswoman, Christie Appelhanz, said: “Our job is not to be legal advocates. We feel very strongly that this needs to be played out in court.”

# Woman seeks advice on communicating with boyfriend's family

DEAR ABBY: I've been dating a wonderful man for several months. We have a great relationship, and I know I'm fortunate to have him. His family is very kind and warm. They have always welcomed me into their home by inviting me to family events, holidays, etc.

The challenge is, his family is from Eastern Europe. He came to the United States at a relatively young age, and his English is perfect. However, his parents and grandparents do not speak or understand English very well.

I want so much to sit down and have a conversation with his mom, but I can't. I'm trying to learn their language, but their alphabet is different from ours. Also, I am dyslexic. While I will not give up on learning their language, it will certainly not happen overnight.

I can't afford classes to get professional help in learning the language, and my boyfriend can't always be right by my side to translate. I'm dying to be able to tell his mother that the dinner was good, or her blouse is pretty.

Can you help me? This will probably be my family one day.

— LINGUISTICALLY LIMITED IN PITTSBURGH  
DEAR LIMITED: You don't necessarily have to learn to read



**Abigail Van Buren**

• Dear Abby

**a language to speak it. You can learn it phonetically, by memorizing words and phrases on tape. Ask your boyfriend to record some of the things you would like to say to his family, and then you can “surprise” them the next time you have dinner there.**

DEAR ABBY: My fiancé and I are having a debate about our wedding. He would like one of his best friends, “Bill,” who is my ex-boyfriend, to be one of his groomsmen.

I don't feel comfortable with Bill and his girlfriend being at our wedding because they have tried to break up my fiancé and me before. Abby, they hate me — and my fiancé thinks they should be there to celebrate our marriage. What do you think about this? Their invitation depends on your response.

— UPSET IN MONTANA

DEAR UPSET: I disagree with your boyfriend. The only guests at your wedding should be those who wish you well. It would be

extremely inappropriate to have them there.

**If you and your fiancé have not had premarital counseling, I hope you will seriously consider it — just to be certain you are on the same page regarding other issues that are sure to come up once you are married. It could save you both a lot of frustration and heartache. Trust me.**

DEAR ABBY: About a month ago, you printed a letter in your column about organ donations from the father of a little boy who had been shot to death while the family vacationed in Europe. He had donated his son's organs in the country where the tragedy occurred.

It brought to mind a question I have had for years about organ donation. Is it true that if you are an organ donor, your family has to pay to have it done?

— LONNIE IN GREENFIELD, MO.

DEAR LONNIE: The answer to your question is NO. The donor family does not have to pay anything. This question has appeared in my column in years past. According to the Living Bank in Houston, the person who receives the organ is responsible for the expenses. The costs are usually covered by health insurance, in-

cluding Medicare and Medicaid. The amount of insurance coverage depends on the organ involved, and the kind of insurance policy the recipient has.

DEAR ABBY: I am 8 years old, and I have a question that has bothered me for months. Is Santa Claus a real person, and if not, why does everyone say he is? And if Santa Claus ISN'T real, where do all the letters go?

— CONFUSED IN KINGSTON, N.Y.

DEAR CONFUSED: Santa Claus is more than a human being. Santa Claus is the living symbol of selfless giving, handed down from one generation to the next. In 1897, a girl named Virginia asked the same question in a newspaper. A very wise newspaper editor, Frank Church, wrote in reply:

**“Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus. ... The most real things in the world are those which neither children nor men can see. ... Thank God, he (Santa Claus) lives, and he lives forever. A thousand years from now — nay, 10 times 10,000 years from now, he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood.”**

Letters to Santa Claus go where every other letter goes —

directly to the U.S. Postal Service, which makes sure the letters reach their destination regardless of “rain, hail, sleet or snow.”

Read on for a testimony from a true believer:

DEAR ABBY: Yesterday afternoon, as I was opening my mail, I came across an envelope with my name and address printed on it, but no return address. I assumed it was junk mail that had been made to look like a Christmas card, but curiosity got the better of me, so I opened it.

Inside was a Christmas card. It was signed “Santa,” and inside were five \$100 bills!

I checked the postmark. It read, “Grand Rapids, Mich., Dec. 9.” Abby, I don't know anyone in Grand Rapids.

I'm divorced. My ex-husband hasn't been helping me to support our children. Times have been hard. Obviously, the card was sent by someone who cares about us very much — someone who went to great trouble to remain anonymous. The money was a blessing. An equally great blessing is the fact that my children had a chance to witness such an act of generosity and kindness.

I hope that Santa is reading your column today, because I want to say thank you very much from the bot-

tom of my heart. I am grateful.

— STILL BELIEVES IN SANTA, HOUSTON

DEAR STILL BELIEVES: I'm printing your letter with the conviction that some kind of elf will ensure that it is delivered as far north as a reindeer can fly. A perceptive person once said that true generosity is doing something nice for someone without taking credit for it. However, your case is exceptional — and how fitting of your benefactor, “Santa,” to take a bow. I know readers of all ages will be as gratified as I was to read about his act of kindness in this, the season of giving.

DEAR ABBY: When you're a guest in someone's home and use the powder room, and the only soap on the bathroom sink is the kind that's pretty and looks like little flowers — do you use one and throw it away when you're finished, or just rinse your hands with plain water?

— EMBARRASSED IN DELAWARE

DEAR EMBARRASSED: Please don't feel embarrassed; yours is a very common question. The answer is that guests should feel free to use what is offered by their hosts. The hosts can throw away the soap later if they wish.

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