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Jailed mom released in time for Mother's Day

By **Judy Masterson**
STAFF WRITER

A Gurnee woman who was jailed on civil contempt charges in family court this week learned Friday that she will be released in time to celebrate Mother's Day with her young son.



MARINA SAMOVSKY / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Lorraine Maltby of Round Lake enters the courthouse with a group of women carrying a sign she made in support of Catherine Campbell.

Catherine Campbell was arrested Tuesday on the order of Lake County Associate Judge Jorge Ortiz after she refused to have her son undergo a psychological evaluation at a Grayslake counseling agency.

On Friday, the petite Campbell, who works as a cashier at a local discount store, shuffled into court in shackles, wearing a navy blue jumpsuit. Nearly 20 supporters, many of them women fighting their own custody battles, crowded into the courtroom to witness the proceedings in which Campbell's attorney Robert Ritacca asked Ortiz to use "the keys to the jailhouse door" and suspend his client's 90-day jail sentence.

Ritacca said that when Campbell questioned the authority of the court order and the credibility of the counseling agency, she made "a mental mistake."

Campbell has been acting as her own attorney in legal skirmishes with her ex-husband, who received temporary custody of their son after her arrest Tuesday. She and Erin McRaith of Glenview, who also lost custody of her children, filed a \$20 million federal suit last January alleging that certain officials of the Lake County circuit, including Ortiz, have shown a pattern of discrimination against women litigating their own custody cases.

The suit was dismissed by a federal judge in March, but will be refiled by the women on the grounds that the dismissal contained erroneous information, said McRaith, who works as a licensed hypnotherapist.

McRaith called Campbell's arrest "retaliation."

"Judge Ortiz refused to take himself off this case while we had federal litigation pending against him," McRaith said. "We'll be back in federal court next week."

Campbell decided against taking her son to the Community Youth Network in Grayslake after the agency refused to disclose details of its counselors' credentials and took him instead to Lake Bluff psychologist Mark Solomon, who found that the boy was happy, well adjusted, and in no need of regular

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counseling.

A growing number of women embroiled in custody disputes argue that court-ordered psychological evaluation of women and children is used as a tool to flip custody to fathers, including some who have histories of domestic violence.

Women including McRaith, Campbell and Annette Zender of Woodstock, who lost custody of her daughter in 2001, claim that the court frequently denies women, particularly pro-se litigants, due process and uses an unfair system of child custody evaluators. They also cite studies that show women are the overwhelming losers in contested child custody cases.

Lake County Court Chief Judge Christopher Starck declined comment on Campbell's case.

Court watchers on Friday included former Round Lake Park Mayor Charlene Bliss Beyer, now of Palatine, who said she is fighting to retain custody in Cook County, and state Sen. Terry Link, D-Waukegan.

"The whole situation is sad," Link said. "We're approaching Mother's Day — I'm about to become a grandfather for the first time — and I know how strong the bond between mother and child is. The parents suffer in these cases but the child suffers even more. We have to look into this and see if there's any injustice being done because one side can afford an attorney and the other can't."

Link said he may offer legislation on the issue pending the outcome of an investigation by Attorney General Lisa Madigan, who is looking at more than 225 victim impact statements collected by Zender, founder of the Illinois Coalition for Family Court Reform.

Campbell, who was awaiting release from jail and reunification with her son late Friday, made an apology to the court, after which Ortiz said he expected a status report from CYN on the boy's progress.

"She apologized to get out of jail," Zender said after the hearing. "She was pressured into it. That's coercion, not justice."

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