

Ayanna Richard:

I wanted protection. There had been threats of my daughter being taken away from me and that there was a possibility that he could take my child and flee, and so I wanted to make sure that we had things in writing and I had some legal ground to stand on in the event that that happened.

My name is Ayanna Richard. I work for a school systems. I've been in special education for almost 20 years now. So I was married, had a daughter, and the marriage didn't last long, decided to go our separate ways. Things had become volatile. We had tried counseling and that was not effective at all. I started seeing little inclinations of escalating to a point that there may be some physical violence involved.

There were threats and they were put in texts and I had voice messages that said such. We didn't have an arrangement as far as custody. I recognized that it wasn't anything that I could kind of chance. I needed to make sure that I had an exit strategy, and the only way I knew to do that was to make sure that I followed and had a legal plan of action so that I didn't end up in a situation where I was stuck or I did something that I shouldn't have done.

In my field of work, working with special education, it is a very litigious situation anyway, and so I deal with attorneys all the time and I value their opinion and I value their expertise. So it was never a question that I needed to call an attorney, needed to get advice about custody as well as advice about divorce and how to go about that entire process because I had never been through that before. This is my first child, first marriage, and I'm like, "I'm completely a fish out of water, so I needed to get some insight." Angela was that person that did that for me.

A friend referred me and said that Angela was phenomenal, and if anybody could help me out to give me good advice, she would be the person that I needed to call and I did. Oh, we hit it off right away. She's amazing. We sat down and I kind of gave her a rundown of what I was dealing with, and she was like, "Look, I'm going to be real. I'm going to be transparent. I might not always tell you what you want to hear, but I'm going to tell you what you need to hear."

That's the type of person that I needed because I'm like, "Just give me the bottom line. What is it that we need to do? How much is it going to cost me? And what do I need to do as far as carrying and following through?" So I think the biggest thing that Angela helped me with that was surprising that I wasn't aware of was the equitable distribution piece, and truly understanding as far as finances and how things were so intermingled and co-mingled from marriage, how to separate those things and what all would be involved and how much had to be dug into to get to the bottom of that.

She certainly was insightful and truly enlightened me on what the law was in North Carolina when it came to equitable distribution when you're going through a divorce. There was always a concern of mine to do any type of overnight visits or to do visits where I wasn't there because I wasn't sure if my child would make it back to me or not. So she was very instrumental in making sure that I always maintained contact, that I always offered that as an option so that it never appeared that I was withholding our daughter because ultimately she was with me full-time at that point in time.

But it was important for us to recognize that we had to make sure that there were opportunities provided for my child's dad to still see her. So she came up with a way for us to do it in a public area so that we didn't have the issue of me not being there. It decreased the possibility a great deal of her not being able to make it back. Having an impartial person like Angela has been for me in this, that she can see whole picture and not just kind of me laser focused on what it is I'm actually dealing with has been a godsend.