

PROPONENT TESTIMONY - HB508

TESTIMONY OF Russ Abrams

Single Father with 50% Visitation and 0% Custody

CIVIL JUSTICE COMMITTEE

OHIO HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, 134TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY

MARCH 8, 2022

Chairman Hillyer, Vice Chair Grendell, Ranking Member Galonski and members of the House Civil Justice Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on HB508.

INTRODUCTION

Russ Abrams, originally from New York, resident of Bexley, Ohio for 14 years. Banking Executive, Lean Sigma Master Black Belt and Army Veteran. Graduated from Indiana University in 1998 with a degree in Policy Analysis, was the Director of Tax Analysis for the State of Indiana and then a researcher at Harvard Kennedy School of Government covering topics on Sexual Trafficking, Education and Housing. The last 22 years I have been focused on improving processes and technology at an assortment of businesses around the world. Started a Non-Profit in Columbus called May We Help, creating inventions for children with disabilities allowing them to perform a daily or activity with their peers.

COMMENTS

Today's Divorce process creates many victims; the children and the bitterness they grow up with. The parents who can't move on and use their children as pawns. For example, both of my son's GAL were victims of their father not being in their lives; their bias was undeniable and not hidden. The average cost for a Divorce is \$25k per parent. Divorce doesn't have to be this way. Across the developed world Divorce is becoming more amicable. Ohio has a divorce rate of 58%; this has become an unfortunate way of life and now should be treated as such; not something that bankrupts families or has an institutional bias. I spent over \$350K for my divorce but today I see my son every other week; his grades and confidence has never been higher and he will be the first to tell you why.

Divorce down under, in Australia is more peaceful than Ohio, the Aussie government requires the use of a mediation APP prior to filing resulting in a 26% reduction in divorce cases; meaning that without the use of attorneys, judges or court time the couple was able to come to an entire settlement on their own. I have attached an article to my testimony outlining the benefits of making divorce an amicable part of life. It starts by treating everyone fair and equitable and moving away from a court system; that puts people against one another where they feel the need to accuse one another of being horrible parents to make themselves look better. We teach our children to work out their differences peacefully; why can't we do the same for the Divorce process, we will be doing a great service for Ohio's mental health.

I want to share a story with you. When my son was 3 right before dinner he was sitting in his chair and I went to get the fish we were about to eat. Just then he quickly grabbed a piece of bread and shoved it in his mouth so I wouldn't see. I turned with the food and saw a panic look on his face and his hands were shaking. Quickly I called 9-1-1 and the operator dispatched an ambulance and walked me through the steps to free the bread. I moved without hesitation following every-word; then the Operator asked can he speak...my son Leo looked at me and said "Daddy my throat hurts". I was relieved and thanked the operator and then the tears and emotion just poured out. The Operator told me not to give him any food or water and we waited for the EMT. The EMT was there within a few minutes, and they examined my son. They saw my tears and checked me out as well I was still shaking. After the EMT finished we went back in, and I emailed my son's mother what had happened. Her response was that before making any medical decisions I should have called her first. Two weeks later my ex filed a contempt claiming child abuse and for not notifying her first bef. Here I was facing an allegation in front of a bias magistrate and the thought of never seeing my son again. I went down to the Franklin County Sherriff's Department to get a copy of the 9-1-1 call and told them about the case. The EMT that examined my son took a day off from work and showed up to testify that I was a good father and not abusive and should be praised not punished. I never met him and didn't really know him, but he saw injustice and stood up for me, a total stranger.

My son is 11 now and as he grows, I encourage care and pride in being unique and like other children he explores his own sense of connection. As children grow, they take pride in who their parents are and seeing their parent's physical traits. Do they have Dad's eyes, Mom's nose and chins, forming a connection and imitating behaviors sometimes at inappropriate times. However, when you separate a child from a parent that creates a loss in time that the child and parent both feel. Children need both parents in their lives not just one or two weekends a month with a parent. [Forty years of child research](#) are clear; children without a second parent in their life results in a lower graduation rate, higher crime rates and drug addiction. Five

counties in Ohio already adopted this policy and have seen a reduction in children abused and neglected has dropped 44%.

CONCLUSION

I fix companies and improve operations for a living and if you want to fix a problem you have to measure it so you can understand and prove the root cause. If we are serious about lowering our child suicide rate, our drug addiction and rates of overdosing let's measure it back to the judge that separated the child from the parent. If you are going to separate a child from a parent and hurt that child for life you better be sure that the evidence is clear and convincing. Today I am luckier than a lot of other parents and I have my son 50% of the time but I lost so much time and I can't get that back and even though the court gave me more time I can't get the time I lost back. We have just lived through a Pandemic, the only thing we have is time, let's not lose any more time between children and parents, enough damage has been done, please vote for equal time and vote for HB 508.

ARTICLE ATTACHMENTS

- Economist January 26th "Divorce in the Rich World is Getting Less Nasty"
- Psychology, Crime & Law, Volume 27, 2021 "Growing up in single-parent families and the criminal involvement of adolescents: a systematic review"

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you again for allowing me to provide testimony on HB 508. I would be happy to answer any questions.