

Thank you to the members of the House Civil Justice Committee for allowing me to submit written testimony on HB508.

My name is Tina Swithin, and I am the founder of One Mom's Battle and Board President of Family Court Awareness Month. I am submitting testimony as a member of the National Safe Parents Organization (NSPO). NSPO ([www.nationalsafeparents.org](http://www.nationalsafeparents.org)) is a nationally recognized umbrella organization for child-focused custody reform with over 100,000 members.

HB 508 is focused on parental rights and entitlement, not child safety. Courts in Ohio and across the country regularly grant 50-50 custody - equal parenting time rulings are the most frequent outcomes of custody disputes. When child safety is in question, judicial officers should always err on the side of caution, but HB 508 will remove their ability to do that.

I ask that you vote NO on HB 508.

I submit my testimony as an advocate but also, as a survivor. I spent a decade in the family court system, desperate to protect my daughters and knowing that they were unsafe in my ex-husband's care. We were subjected to almost 50 court dates, two full child custody evaluations, appointment of minor's counsel, three child welfare investigations, and over a dozen interactions with law enforcement. It took years before family court professionals recognized and validated that in fact, my children were not safe as I had been saying for years.

Running parallel to our family court case, and as a direct result of the court failing to protect my children, my daughters were victimized and subjected to a criminal trial that spanned five-years and made national news. Thankfully, this resulted in a conviction and a subsequent prison sentence of 280-years. When family court professionals make a mistake, you don't receive an apology, nor do they make promises to do better. Because my ex-husband's parental rights trumped by children's rights to safety, we will likely be unpacking their trauma and navigating PTSD for a lifetime.

We know that domestic violence is about power and control. Domestic violence is slow, insidious and pervasive and it doesn't always involve physical abuse. The most painful, long-lasting injuries are the ones that are not visible. These are the hardest injuries to heal but, they are also the most difficult injuries to prove in family court.

Due to the emotional and psychological abuse I experienced from my ex-husband, I have been diagnosed with complex-PTSD by multiple professionals. The abuser's desire for power and control doesn't simply vanish when the relationship ends, it often intensifies and transfers to a new platform which is the family court system. In order to maintain power and control, the abuser uses the children as pawns and as leverage to inflict pain on the safe parent. The abuse I suffered post-separation was far worse than the abuse in my marriage.

I shudder to think how much worse my family court journey would have been under legislation like HB 508. It is equally painful to think of the children whose lives are in the hands of the family court system now or in the future. This legislation will have devastating consequences for victims of abuse and their children.

Thank you again for this opportunity. Please vote NO on HB 508.

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