

I want to thank the members of the House civil justice committee for allowing me to testify today. My name is Nancy Fingerhood, I live in Canfield, Ohio and I am here on behalf of the Ohio Chapter of the National Organization for Women. I am also a member of the National Safe Parents Organization which is the national umbrella organization on protective custody reform in the US, and a mother with lived experience. I ask that you vote NO on HB 508. The bill would switch the determination for custody from the best interest of children to the best interest of parents. This is a bill for parental rights, not the children's rights to safety and stability.

This bill is NOT just for safe parents as the sponsors of this bill state because the presumption of shared parenting will help abusive parents. They say there is a rebuttable presumption for domestic violence and child abuse, however, they also are the ones promoting the idea that mothers fabricate allegations of abuse to get custody. False allegations of sexual abuse are uncommon, even in custody disputes. According to Bala et al. (2007), non-custodial fathers (15%) were more likely to make international false allegations of abuse than custodial parents, mostly mothers (9%).

The vast majority of custody cases are settled out of court. Only 10% of cases end up in family court and of those 10%, 75% involve domestic violence and child abuse. Yet, according to Joan Meier's study, "Child Custody Outcomes in Cases Involving Parental Alienation and Abuse Allegations," courts only believe mothers' abuse claims 39% of the time and if fathers cross claim with parental alienation they reject abuse claims at an even higher rate. The research and studies that I am discussing with you can be found at the end of my submitted written testimony.

The sponsors claim that shared parenting reduces conflict even in cases where there is previous conflict between parents. This is absolutely not true. Here is my personal experience. My child's father would counter parent while I did my best to navigate the chaos that he created. BECAUSE of shared parenting, getting anything for our daughter was a huge issue - from getting her braces to vacation days to allowing her to see a therapist. When someone is using coercive control to continue to have power and control over you, shared parenting only escalates conflict and often prevents the safe parent from taking care of a child's needs. Coercive control leaves no physical bruises so it is not like could file a police report which would be necessary to even consider not having shared parenting if this bill is passed.

One of the amendments includes punitive provisions around a parent who has made "false allegations" of child abuse and domestic abuse. Yet, Ohio already prosecutes false allegations. Under Ohio Revised Code (2921.13), making false statements to the police or any government representatives or officials under certain circumstances is illegal. In addition, penalties for perjury in family court range from civil penalties to jail time, with statutory issues that range from Class D misdemeanors all the way up to the felony level.

We have data to show presumed shared parenting is not in the best interest of children. In 2000, Wisconsin was the first state to enact a presumptive shared parenting, Act 130. A study in Wisconsin Lawyer looked at 20 counties in Wisconsin and found that "Act 130 is not widely producing placement orders that explicitly attend to safety." In addition, the act does not ensure that victims of abuse receive sole custody of children.

Unfortunately, father's rights groups such as the National Parents Organization (formerly Fathers and Families) are exploiting the unfounded fears that family courts are biased against fathers. They are misrepresenting data from Kentucky to make the specious claim that "50/50 presumption laws reduce domestic violence"- and it seems some Ohio lawmakers have fallen for the ruse. Materials have been disseminated in support of the bill making the false claim that the outcome of Kentucky's shared parenting law has had the effect of reducing domestic violence cases. According to the Data Officer and Information and Technology Services Department of Kentucky Administrative Office of the Courts: "My department makes no such claim about the effect of the [Kentucky 50/50] bill and I am not aware of any particular reason to expect that it is the cause for this trend [of reduced filings]. A reasonable supposition for the decline in 2020 might be the COVID-19 pandemic. A considerable reduction in the rates of filings in most categories can be seen for CY2020." There is no proof this bill would decrease the cost of litigation. Yet the sponsors make this claim with no evidence. In addition, the Kentucky Coalition against Domestic Violence has stated there is "absolutely no correlation between passage of the Kentucky law and the rate of domestic violence in our state."

The intersection of domestic violence and child abuse is well documented. Many family court judges and other personnel are not well-versed on the research regarding the negative impact of domestic violence on children. Without this understanding, they allow the mother's abuser to maintain custody of the children. Unfortunately, the abuse does not end when the mother leaves. It is channeled into post-separation abuse and/or the abuser directly abuses the child.

In the bill, it states a court may terminate a shared parenting order on the motion of one or both parents if the court determines either of the following: (A) The shared parenting agreement incorporated into the order is detrimental to the child based on the factors under section 3109.0411 of the Revised Code. (B) One parent demonstrates a pattern of willfully creating conflict in an attempt to disrupt a current or pending shared parenting arrangement and the court determines both of the following by a preponderance of the evidence: (1) It is unable to enter a shared parenting order that will reduce areas of conflict caused by the disruptive parent. Please be aware that protective parents and their protective behaviors are frequently interpreted as disruptive, unfriendly, uncooperative, and even alienating behaviors. Research is showing that when the parent accused of abuse responds by accusing the protective parent is the one interfering with the parenting relationship, the abuser is significantly more likely to get custody of the children - even when there is proof of the abuse.

In a study done in Ohio by Michelle Bemiller called **When Battered Mothers Lose Custody: A Qualitative Study of Abuse at Home and in the Courts**, research found that mothers' allegations of abuse were not believed in the courts and very often they lost custody to the abusers. For example, she cited Gloria, who "had substantiated reports of abuse but her ex-partner was granted custody of their six-year-old daughter. Judges refused to hear undocumented cases of abuse. Lenore in the study, for example, attempted to bring her ex-husband's domestic charges to the judge's attention. Lenore's ex-husband's attorney stated that these charges should not be brought up in court as they had no bearing on the current case. The judge agreed."

A mom asked what to do if she suspects her toddler is being sexually abused by her ex. Here was my advice: have her tell her pediatrician. tell the pediatrician to ask her how things are going at her dad's. Then the pediatrician will call the police (do not get CPS involved because they often get it wrong). Do not do it yourself or they will not believe you or say you coached her. It upsets me to no end that as mothers we can't just call the police and be believed. That we have to jump through hoops to protect our kids and strategize like this. It is infuriating.

Every family is different and each case in family court should be looked at individually. If we are going to focus our energy in any way in the family court system, let it be that judges are ensuring both parents with designated parenting time are truly "fit, willing, and able" in the best interest of the children. Thank you again for this opportunity. Please vote NO on HB 508.

I am now going to read the testimony of several protective mothers within Ohio with current cases who have been silenced by their abusers and the courts. They have asked to be anonymous and have me read it because they fear retaliation - the possibility of losing custody and the possibility of further abuse because of speaking out.

SOURCES:

<https://www.wisbar.org/NewsPublications/WisconsinLawyer/Pages/article.aspx?Volume=91&Issue=11&ArticleID=26737> *
<https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/302141.pdf>

Child Custody Outcomes in Cases Involving Parental Alienation and Abuse Allegations

GWU Law School Public Law Research Paper No. 2019-56

GWU Legal Studies Research Paper No. 2019-56

https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3448062

Trocme, N. & Bala, N., False allegations of abuse and neglect when parents separate, *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 29(12), pp. 1333-1345,

Ollendick, White & White, *The Oxford Handbook of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology*, 499 (2018).

See generally, Jaffe, Zerwer & Poisson, *Access Denied: The Barriers of Violence & Poverty for Abused Women and their Children After Separation* (citing four studies, all of which found 70-75% of cases in litigation involved allegations of domestic violence).

When Battered Mothers Lose Custody: A Qualitative Study of Abuse at Home and in the Courts <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15379410802583742>

ANONYMOUS #1

Thank you for allowing me to provide my testimony. I urge you to vote no on HB 508.

My child and I's abuser is a mental abuser. He stalks us, gaslights, destroys social capital financially abuses and controls our environment. Our case shares common denominators and red flags of common domestic abuse.

He wasn't a perfect husband. He stayed out late after work and on weekends drinking, spent all of our money and complained about watching our baby when I went on a daily 45 minute run. yet he was charismatic to outsiders. He cancelled our daycare repeatedly when I got a job as a painter in the art district. He kept me home often with an empty bank account and no phone. I never wanted conflict.

Out of the blue my husband took over our residence and told me to leave with our 18 month old baby, he needed space. He blocked out the windows and demanded my key. He had told the property staff and our neighbor watch our apartment and call him if I returned because he said I wasn't supposed to be there stating I was dangerous. My daughters medical care became a Medicaid case within weeks.

2.He kept all of my child's belongings and items to care for her and including a bed. He took all the money out of our account and our health insurance card. He sabotaged the electric in my car.

3.I went to my elderly parents home to stay.

4.He created videos of himself talking on the phone to me asking me to pick up our child. I said yes and made attempts to arrange an amicable time. He called everyday all day and asked thousands of times. I begged him to explain why I couldn't come home and what was happening. He edited videos to include all my frustrated responses he got all the perfect shots. Because these videos were never admissible in court he showed them to our court professional who listed the videos in the report made.

He filed for divorce. He claimed he was the primary caregiver, and that I had no home, no job, no belongings, no place for a child to stay, no bed for my child, and I was violent. Being motivated by his insecurity these were all things he was trying to materialize at the time of the filing.

He was never a caregiver and I was never violent.

4 At the first chance I had I counter complained of his cruelty and abuse toward our Child and I. But you see the acts of disabling me in a court perspective was the abuse itself. I was told to take abuse claims to criminal court and "abuse claims were serious" as if I were not serious. I was told if I didn't drop those our hearing that day would not take place and be taken off of the immediate schedule.

5.Per 50/50 "My situation" was the problem. But the real problem was he was exhibiting dangerous impulsive behavior toward my daughter and I. I believe my ex husband was having some insecure thoughts about being a new dad and spiraled into cheating. He never told me why he filed.

He was awarded custody of our daughter.

She was diagnosed with anxiety and trichotillomania (hair ripping and pulling) at 8 years old. She is a cutter and has thought about suicide. She did not form a secure attachment to either parent during her childhood. Only now is she learning secure family bonds always existed from her mother myself who has limited parenting time. She was trained to be fearful of me, her mother and rewarded for showing me dislike.

Custody was decided upon using the wrong factors under 50/50.

My daughter and I are both in counseling.

I have PTSD and heart problems. I no longer run.

When an abuser wins custody is they never had the intention to care for the the child. When this happens you take away that child's psychological safety at minimum and it goes on from there. Please vote no on HB508.

ANONYMOUS #2

Hello. I am so sorry I can not be standing in front of you today, but I am very thankful for Nancy to be able to share my story and my request to OPPOSE Bill 508- 50/50 Parenting Time bill. First, I would like to share a few stories of what it's like to walk in the shoes of a Domestic Violence survivor, myself. My ex-husband and I were married for over 8 years. We brought two beautiful baby boys into this world together that I would never regret but what I do regret is living in fear and control from my ex-husband. He was volatile and never satisfied. He lettered his socks, and I wasn't allowed to hang his button shirts because I didn't do it right. I had to keep the TV volume on even numbers. He once drove his truck, with me in the passenger side, off the road driving much faster than the speed limit aiming the passenger side of the truck at an electric pole. Why did he do this? Because I was crying because of his verbal abuse, and he wanted me to stop crying. He got stopped just feet before the pole. I thought I was going to die that day. Another time he dropped me off on a state road and made me walk over a mile before he came back to pick me up. He wouldn't allow me to have my phone or my purse. Another time he removed a pork roast out of the oven at 350 degrees, when he got home from work, and threw it at my head "because I didn't cook it right". He used to take my car keys and throw them in our field during his tantrums so I couldn't get away during the abuse. I had pop bottles thrown at my head, coffee tables kicked at me, and shoved across rooms at the hands of my ex-husband, our children's father. There are so many stories. Once I accidentally put the milk away in the wrong place in the fridge, he had a spot for everything. At that time our first son was just 2 years old and 2nd son still and infant. That morning resulted in him picking up our family dog, throwing him across the kitchen into a wall in front of our son. Our 2-year-old ran to me screaming in tears and hiding behind my legs. My ex-husband proceeded to threaten to go upstairs, get his gun and kill me as he headed for the stairs. I had to get in his way and luckily, I convinced him not to kill me. I thought I was going to die, again, that day. I'm sure by now you are all asking yourselves "Why didn't she call law enforcement? Where was her restraining order?" The answer to that question is because of FEAR! True debilitating fear. I was too afraid to reach out for help. You have to realize while all of the physical abuse is happening, so is verbal, mental, and emotional abuse, and at it's highest. He told me every time that nobody would believe me, after all I never had any real injuries to be treated for. He was also very good at turning himself into the victim after these incidents. He would threaten to kill himself by driving his truck into an oncoming semi. He eventually started to take his aggression out on our 2-year-old son if I didn't quickly forgive him. He would spank him so hard for normal 2-year-old behaviors. When he would undress our son, he would yank his shirt off so hard the neck line of his shirt would catch his ears and make them bleed. After months of marriage counseling, I eventually left. He threatened that he would do everything in his power to ruin my life if I left but one day while he was at work I packed our 2 children, 2 dogs, and 3 laundry baskets into my SUV and left. I sent him a text and he didn't seem to care, to my surprise, he baked cookies that night and never asked about our children or when he would see them. I mistakenly pushed for his involvement but during our dissolution starting 2011 and finally ending 2012, because although we agreed to everything, he wouldn't sign the papers. His idea was that he would not want or fight for 50/50 parenting if I agreed to a much lessor amount in child support. I agreed. He got our sons 2 days a week one week and 2.75 days another week, no holidays, no summer vacations. I did all of the caring for our children as he wanted nothing to do with doctors appts or sick days, he said it was my job, just like when we were married. Because of my ex-husband I have spent the majority of the last 11 years in court trying to protect our sons from the abuse he then started with them. In 2014, I was recommended full custody and all decision making and he was recommended standard parenting time. He again, came with a settlement offer. If I take less child support again, he would take less than standard time. He also agreed to "not calling our children sissies and faggots" along with a multitude of other protective orders in this settlement. I kept our boys in therapy for support. Our sons were eventually diagnosed with multiple mental health issues. In 2018 I mistakenly took the bait that gave my ex the opportunity to draw me back to court. During our current case our oldest son has suffered a diagnosed enclosed head injury upon initial encounter, by an ER doctor. I have a recording of that event that I wish I could be there to play for all of you now but because of an open case, I cannot. It makes most people cry to hear our then 10-year-old son screaming in pain and fear while his 6 foot 3 inch approximately 230 pound father was attacking him. How did I get that recording you ask? Our second son turned on his phone during the event and recorded it, he said he wanted to prove their father was hurting them at his house. Also, during our current case, our oldest son, 12 at the time was attacked again by being picked up by his neck and upper torso and wrestled into a metal coat hook by his father. I have pics of the injuries that I wish I could show you, but I can't publicly right now. Our son was diagnosed by his pediatrician through x-rays, with rib contusions from that event. You are now probably wondering where law enforcement was, CPS, our sons GAL, etc. was? The sheriff from the

first event tried to pursue child endangering charges, and CPS closed the case after just one meeting with my ex-husband's attorney. The GAL was absolutely no help at all. I even sent her the recording, ER report, etc. and she didn't even come check on our children. In almost 2 years of having her as a GAL she did nothing to help protect my kids. She gave credit to an unqualified individual over the professional diagnosis of a two-time PhD psychologist and let my kids down. During my ex-husband's home visit my son was trying to show her injuries he had just gotten (a scratch on his face and a fingernail gash out of his hand) just from the ride to his house where my ex-husband wrestled him while driving and the GAL ignored our son. She wasn't around for the coat hook incident because she quit on my kids. Now that I have shared with you the reality of domestic violence and the fear, confusion, and strength it takes to leave before it's too late, do you truly think automatic 50/50 parenting is ok. I can promise you, as a survivor who is still fighting for the protection of her kids, voting yes to bill 508 would be a grave, in some cases literally, mistake and therefore I kindly beg you to vote no. Please do not take away the opportunity of safe parents to try to protect their children. Thank you for your time to hear about my very traumatizing experience as a domestic violence survivor and a safe parent still fighting for the protection of my children. HB 508 does not get rid of the issues I have faced and in fact would make them much worse. God Bless.

Anonymous #3

Dear Members of the House Civil Justice Committee,

The following is an anonymous testimony in opposition of HB 508 for equal parenting rights. Through this testimony you will see that I have gone from having sole custody to shared parenting to visitation with my child. Under HB 508, I would have been likely labeled as the uncooperative parent, even though I was trying to protect my child from physical and sexual abuse allegations that my child made. HB 508 would have given me the same outcome, if not worse, by having the court award the majority of parenting time to my co-parent and ex-husband initially because he appeared to be the cooperative parent on paper. While HB 508 would have allowed me to see my child more, I believe that this testimony will illustrate systematic abuses and violations, dangerous practice, gender bias, economic abuses, financial and social disempowerment, threats, silencing, and other abuses by the Ohio Family Law Courts.

I first became involved in the Ohio Family Law Courts over 8 years ago. Being a part of this system has led me to believe that those who are abused and should be protected by law will continue to be abused via the family court system. Ohio HB 508 would not only continue to perpetuate this abuse but deprioritize child and parent safety. Shortly, after my ex-husband had unsupervised visitation, our child started acting out sexually on pets.

Later those sexual acts would go on to fondle a girl at school, insert a toy in a pet's bottom and even fondling adult women in public places. Our child would talk about various sexual names of our child's genitals that no child at this age under normal circumstances would be able to make. Our child even acted out certain sexual games. Our child alleged sexual abuse by my ex-husband to therapists, family members, and even family friends. Our child also has known documented medical issues that appear to all be related to what our child has disclosed to numerous people.

I tried to further protect our child and the more I tried to protect our child, the more I was labeled as an uncooperative parent and the less time I received with our child. No one would listen in the family court system and gag orders were made into court orders. Due to the nature of our child's allegations and acting out, HB 508 would have not only made things worse for our child and it would have also put me in an even more difficult position. I would have silenced our child for our child's own protection.

Members of the House Civil Justice Committee, how would I protect our child with 508 when there needs to be a preponderance of the evidence? Isn't it our duty as parents to protect our children? With the current law in place, I was already labeled as the uncooperative parent. Had HB 508 been in effect my child's voice would have not even been heard. The current family courts system does need a reform, but HB 508 is not the answer.

My ex-spouse has violated me physically, sexually, verbally, and emotionally. He has done this in front of our child, but our child is still not protected. Most of our allegations are he said/ she said, except I have audio recordings, my ex-husband has plead the 5th, and I have a diagnosis that 3 different medical professionals have diagnosed me with: PTSD likely caused by abuse. None of these facts matter in our current system. If OH HB 508 was a law, I would not leave, and I may not be here today. My ex-husband was getting more violent as the time went on and started to suffocate me.

At this point in our relationship, I was so brainwashed that I could not see what he was trying to do to me. My psychologist put it simple: he was trying to murder me. I was naïve in every way and thought that the courts would help protect me. Initially they did protect us, but eventually I would lose all custody and only have visitation. Now our child is no longer protected.

Our child is afraid to speak out because our child thinks the courts will take me away altogether, so our child complies. Our child has shown me journal entries where our child is afraid. Our child has been told that I am a bad mother and that our child is stupid. Our child has had physical symptoms that you cannot ignore, and I have no reason not to believe our child. Our child's stance has not changed on what has happened even though custody was switched several years ago.

HB 508 is for the parents and not the child. There is no protection afforded for children against domestic violence. In my case, I would not have been able to provide the threshold of preponderance of evidence. Most DV survivors would not be able to, because that is the nature of domestic violence: it takes place behind closed doors. In my case if OH HB 508 were a law, I would have no options, but to stay with my abuser. I would have to risk my life to save my son's life because I would not have gone through with a divorce.

Each time, I have gone to court I am seen as the problem and uncooperative parent, even though I just want my child's concerns to be heard and for our child to live a life free from abuse. OH HB 508 does the exact opposite and prioritizes parental rights even more.

Our child witnessed domestic violence and reported that to therapists, but nothing was done to protect our child. Nothing was done to protect me. I was our child's primary caregiver and our child had to learn to cope with our child's primary attachment stripped away from our child when I chose to leave my abuser. I thought I was doing what was best for our child. I wanted our child to be free from violence and abuse, but in the end, I could not protect our child because of Ohio family court.

Our child has had suicidal ideations in father's care after custody switched to my ex-husband. Father has reported these thoughts to therapists, but shortly after reporting these ideations my ex-husband removed our child from therapy. My child and I have been abused by the courts psychologically and financially. Ohio HB 508 will not protect our child. I believe it would have been even more detrimental to our child. I have seen systemic oppression and racism in the family law court system and a failure to protect an innocent child. I can no longer protect my own child from abuse and guarantee a safe environment outside of my home.

Ohio Family courts need reform for the best interest of the child and not the best interest of a parent as Ohio 508 proposes. The current system has failed us. Had OH 508 been a law, we most likely would have been a statistic and our child would have been raised without their mother. I would have never left my abuser and frankly my psychologist believes I would have been dead. No one deserves the systemic abuse of family law court in a contested divorce and custody case, and no one should choose to stay or leave because they are afraid, they will not be able to protect their child. Had HB 508 been a law, I would not have chosen to leave my abuser and I may not be here today. I respectfully ask you to vote no HB 508 and instead work on enacting laws that are focused on the child's protection, rather than parental rights.

Sincerely,
A concerned parent

Summary if short on time:

Dear Members of the House Civil Justice Committee,

The following is an anonymous testimony in opposition of HB 508 for equal parenting rights. Through this testimony you will see that I have gone from having sole custody to shared parenting to visitation with my child. Under HB 508, I would have been likely labeled as the uncooperative parent, even though I was trying to protect my child from physical and sexual abuse allegations that our child made. Our child has acted out in several ways including sexual acts: against animals, children at school, and even adult women. Our child has also had physical symptoms documented by various professionals including the medical profession. Our child has also disclosed sexual and physical abuse to various professionals. My ex-husband has abused me physically, sexually, verbally, and psychologically and several of those acts were carried out in front of our child. At least through the current system I have been able to give our child a voice even though our child was not believed.

Even though custody switched to my ex-husband several years ago, our child's story has not changed, and our child has become suicidal. Our child no longer has a safe space to talk to any adult due to fear. Had HB 508 been a law, I would have had counsel our child to be silent and I would not have chosen to leave my abuser. I would have chosen to risk my life to save our child's. HB 508 is for the parents and not the child. There is no protection afforded for children against domestic violence. In my case, I would not have been able to provide the threshold of preponderance of evidence. Most DV survivors would not be able to, because that is the nature of domestic violence: it takes place behind closed doors. If OH HB 508 were a law, I would have no options, but to stay with my abuser. I respectfully ask you to vote no HB 508 and instead work on enacting laws that are focused on the child's protection, rather than parental rights.

Sincerely,

A concerned parent

Anonymous #4

I ask that you vote NO on HB 508. This is a bill that trump's children's rights to protection in favor of parental rights. 10% of custody cases are contested. 75% of those contested cases are domestic violence cases. This bill presents an issue that requires a high understanding of domestic violence and the abuse of power. Because this bill affects 75% of the contested custody cases, it is a bill to strip domestic violence survivors from more boundaries and help abusive parents obtain power and control. Shared parenting is NOT in the best interest of parents or children who are victims of domestic violence

One of the ways abusers gain power and control is by creating false narratives. Contrary to what the bill states, courts do not favor fathers and fathers make up more false allegations than mothers. Studies show that mothers make up allegations of sexual abuse only 2% of the time. However, 75% of sexual abuse claims by protective mothers result in custody given to the accused father. With this extraordinary gap, there is a belief by mothers of sexually abused children, that our family court system is trafficking our children. These false narratives by abusers are rooted in a well-studied tactic called, DARVO. DARVO stands for Deny, Attack, Reverse Victim and Offender. In this sexual abuse example, the father denies sexually abusing the child. Then claims mother coached the child to make up the allegations and tells the court that the mother was making it up. The court sees the father as a victim of false allegations. The court punishes the mother by removing custody of the child. When we educate the court about DARVO, the abusers are less likely to get away with their false narratives. However, the false narratives are still planted in the minds of the rulers. So, we must look at the research. he Saunder's study says that the selection of a custodial parent should be based on which parent is most likely to reduce the fear and stress.

There is conflicting research about the benefit of shared parenting arrangements, but there is widespread agreement by legitimate researchers. Shared parenting can only benefit children under favorable conditions that include 3 things: 1. voluntary agreement by both parents, (doesn't happen in DV) 2. ability to cooperate and (doesn't happen in DV) 3. living nearby (DV survivors seek protected addresses) Because DV involves a fundamental imbalance of power, co-parenting in these cases is harmful. Saunders found that abusers use joint decision-making to regain control by refusing to agree to anything the mother wants. He also found that abusers often use visitation exchanges to harass or assault the victim.

In DV cases, if the abuser will receive unsupervised visitation, the best approach is parallel parenting. The children have witnessed their father's abuse and are often frightened when their parents are together. Parallel parenting reduces communication to absolute necessary situations. Abusers do not co-parent; they counter-parent. It is unsafe and unhealthy to allow shared parenting when there is a history of DV and one parent is afraid of the other. Abusers often use shared parenting to interfere with needed treatment. Accordingly, it is critical for the safe parent to have complete control over health care. It is best practice is to pressure the abuser to change his behavior and to focus on how to reduce the fear and stress he caused. Shared parenting does just the opposite. Even the research most favorable to co-parenting found it only works under the

best of circumstances. You are making a decision for the 75% who are victims of domestic violence. Please vote NO on HB 508.