

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

My name is Amy Cox and I am from Eaton Ohio, located in Preble County. I am a divorced parent and an educator with more than 13 years experience in the public school system.

First I will address my concerns as a parent who went through a long and costly divorce. I will not bore the committee with the details but I will offer up some relevant information.

1. I made \$44,000 annually and paid \$25,000 to get divorced because my ex continued to contest custody, even though he worked a swing shift plus mandatory overtime and had since the kids were born. This is what is known as financial abuse and it absolutely is recognised as domestic abuse in academic and clinical settings. As I read through HB508 I saw debt stacking up, savings sucked dry and most importantly, since the bill is supposed to be “child centered”, the livelihoods of the children going to filing fee after filing fee. If this bill is to truly be in the best interest of the children, perhaps there should be legislation on limits to how much a divorce can cost and it should depend on the income of the parents. I am thankful that the court placed custody with me, especially in those early days of separation because my kids would’ve been with a babysitter more than their dad. I was and always had been their primary caregiver. I can’t imagine what that would’ve done to my kids and me at that time. A HB508 would’ve cost me and my kids even more emotionally and financially.

2. Guardian Ad Litem are not good enough in contested divorces unless they have specific training regarding domestic violence. A family forensic psychological evaluation should be consulted with any proof, allegations or suspicion of intimate partner violence or domestic abuse. The complicated psychology of a family that's ended up in family court cannot possibly be thoroughly evaluated by legal professionals and when they are, they can have devastating effects if they aren’t properly trained or informed, simply missed something they didn’t know to look for, or cognitive bias.

Secondly, as an educator for more than a decade, I have had exposure to the general population and specifically juveniles who are often children of divorced parents. Kids do best with consistency and mutual respect between the parents and that seemed to be the norm. I taught

high school kids so they tended to move freely between parents depending on their needs if both parents were available and willing. In some cases the kids primarily lived with one parent and it seemed to be fairly equal between mom or dad. Sometimes the arrangement was good and sometimes bad. Many times the kid moved in with their dad or mom as they got older and that was sometimes good, but sometimes bad. I say all of this to underline the reality that family dynamics are complicated and often change as people move in and out of those kids' lives and as those kids grow up and through adolescence. There is no legislation that can possibly fit these families into a one-size-fits-all bill. Legislators are generally not experts on family psychology and or family law specifically and should not be burdened with the expectation to be those experts. Nor should children suffer anymore than they already do when there's a divorce.

Lastly, I'd like to point out Sec. 5153.16. which seems to be the failsafe of the bill for children who are considered "in need of services". This section goes on for six pages of what the county children services duties will be, all with substantial price tags as nothing is free or cheap anymore and that's been the case with childcare for decades. Preble county has to use foster families out of the county because we don't always have enough within the county and this comes at a higher premium. I thought it was interesting that Preble county just voted down a levie to help pay for foster care specific expenses and Mr. Creech actively campaigned against the levie in his own county. Although he claimed that the money could be obtained from the commission as they currently have a surplus, the foster kids and families just weren't priority enough to support levied funds that didn't depend on the commission having and granting funds that may or may not be there from year to year. I am left to question how serious the Co-sponsor is about protecting the most vulnerable of children who are often invisible because there is no mom or dad in their case.

Thank you again for your time.

Sincerely,

Amy Cox