

I ask you to please vote NO on House Bill 508. This bill concerns me because I am a domestic violence survivor and I work with domestic violence survivors. This bill, as it is currently written, does not protect domestic violence survivors and their children from ongoing abuse. In Ohio from 2016-June 30, 2020 there were 23 children killed by domestic violence abusers. More concerning, from July 1, 2020-June 30, 2021 there were 15 children killed by domestic violence abusers in Ohio.

This would mean that even if a domestic violence survivor had a civil protection order against their abuser it would not be enough to overturn a 50/50 custody order. This bill is more concerned about those rights of the parent than what is best for the child. As I have seen these do not always align.

House Bill 508 would replace ORC 3109.042, professionally I see the benefits of this statute for my clients. This law states that if there is no custody order an unwed single mother is the sole legal and residential custodian of her child. Too often, do I see children be manipulated into controlling domestic violence survivors. This is also my personal story.

This is my story of how the system works against you when your abuser and their family have connections. I would like you to keep in mind that I had support and resources in leaving my abuser; many domestic violence survivors do not have these resources. It has been my personal experience that the legal system does not always help a domestic violence survivor.

In 2017, I fled from Kentucky to London Ohio. I fled because if I stayed with my now ex-husband would have killed me. I filed for a protection order in Nelson County Kentucky. However, my father-in-law knew I had filed it before I even knew that it was denied! I had a mental inquest warrant done on my husband. He had threatened to kill himself to try and get me to come back to the house (when a domestic violence abuser threatens to kill themselves lethality is increased by 60%). When my ex-husband went to Communicare, to have a psychological evaluation, he drove himself (despite this not being the protocol, sheriffs are supposed to take you); he still had his pistol in the truck. He was not even gone for 30 minutes, and we live 20 minutes away from Communicare. I went to the house to get some clothes for me and my children, my boys were at the time 4 and 2. When we began to pull into the driveway, my ex-husband was checking the mailbox and pointed his pistol at the car with me and our two children. Thankfully, I was able to back up and leave. Less than an hour later, I was on my way to London Ohio to my grandma's vacant home.

I was in Ohio for about a month before I went to Covington Kentucky to file for a protection order against. I spoke with a victim advocate and she advised me to not file in Madison County because he would know where I was. The protection order from Covington, Kenton County was granted. At my first hearing, I was served with a complaint for divorce. My husband had consultations with every law firm in Bardstown Kentucky, he also had consultations with almost every attorney I called in Louisville Kentucky; all these attorneys could not even speak to me because of the conflict. I eventually retained legal representation from an attorney that had represented many abused women. My attorney cost \$300 an hour and a consultation cost me \$250. I am fortunate that my grandma offered to pay for this along with allowing me to live in her home. There are many domestic violence survivors that do not have these resources. I am blessed.

After retaining my attorney, my (now) ex-husband filed for emergency custody of the children. In hindsight I know that this was done to scare me. He really had no interest in my children as he has not seen or talked to them in almost 5 years.

Upon the advice of my divorce attorney, I dismissed my protection order and we had a no contact order. I also had temporary custody of the children as part of the agreement. My husband would get to see the children from 10am to 5pm every other weekend. The first visitation began the day of my hearing after I dismissed the protection order. I drove straight to Bardstown Kentucky, picked up my children from my mother's house and went to the gas station to meet my husband. He was not there. I later found out that instead of picking up his children he chose to retrieve his guns from the Kenton County Sheriff's Office in Covington Kentucky. He had not seen his children for almost two months at this point. His guns were more important to him. His next visit with the children resulted in him breaking our custody agreement by drinking around the children and having them ride in a vehicle without seatbelts.

As part of our temporary custody agreement, we both had to take a 10-panel hair follicle drug test. My results came back negative for everything. His on the other hand came back positive for everything except LSD. The results for methamphetamine were so high the test results stated that he could have been manufacturing. My attorney promptly filed a motion to suspend parenting time; the motion was granted. For the next two years my ex-husband did nothing to try to get parenting time. He never took another drug test; he did not attend rehab.

At our second mediation, my ex-husband gave me sole legal custody of our children. I agreed to take less money for the settlement and \$300 less in child support per month. He has only paid me child support one time. He is currently in arrears of \$15,000+. The agreement states that he must go to reunification therapy alone, and then when the therapist decides it is time the children will join him; when the therapist decides he is ready for visitation we will then mediate about visitation. As of today, three years later, he has never started the reunification therapy.

Mediation was scary for me. The power balance between an abuser and a survivor are not equal. It was difficult to mediate with my ex-husband. I am thankful that I had a great attorney. I would like to remind you that many domestic violence survivors will face this process pro-se, and it will be intimidating.

My divorce took 2 years, with my legal bill at \$19,000. My children were worth every penny. If I had went to trial in Kentucky, there would have been the presumption of 50/50 custody because a similar bill to HB 508 did pass in Kentucky one month after my divorce was final.

My children are different today than when they were when they saw their father. They are happy well-adjusted children. They know that they are loved. I immediately put all of us in therapy when I got to Ohio. I was deeply worried that not having a dad would affect them negatively. I now know that this is not true. Empirical research tells us that children are better with one attentive happy parent than living with two parents in a toxic environment. I wrote a capstone project on the effects of domestic violence on children for my associates degree in Criminal Justice and have binders of research to support that statement. Adverse childhood experiences can negatively affect children into adulthood, even their physical health.

I know that this is just my story, but in working with domestic violence survivors I hear this story all too often. I ask that you please consider how this bill will affect the lives of children whose parents commit domestic violence. Domestic violence is an underreported crime because victims are often blamed and not believed.

Today, I have chosen to share my personal story with you in hopes that it will remind you that not all parents are good parents. I hope that my story will show you that sometimes children are used to control and manipulate a domestic violence survivor. I would like to thank you for your time and ask that you please do not pass this bill, as it is currently written. Please think how this bill will affect all Ohioans.