

**TESTIMONY OF ANDREA R. YAGODA SUPPORTING
SENATE BILL 202
SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE**

Chair Manning, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Thomas, and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee thank you for affording me the opportunity to testify today. My name is Andrea R. Yagoda, and I live in Delaware County, Ohio and have been a resident of Ohio for forty eight (48) years. I am a retired attorney.

As a retired domestic relations attorney I applaud this Bill and proudly ask that this Committee vote yes. Here is my story. A young man learned that he and his wife were going to have a baby. In anticipation he decided to earn a little extra money so they could purchase items needed for this new eagerly anticipated addition to their family. This young man took on the job of delivering newspapers in the early morning hours before he went to his full time job as a automobile mechanic. While sitting in his car assembling the papers an unidentified man walked up to the car and shot him. As a result the young man suffered severe head injuries. This included the loss of his sight. Sadly, he never saw his son. After a year his wife decided that she could not live with a blind man. The parties divorced. Because of the loss of his sight, this young man was summarily denied most parental rights with his son. His “visitation” was severely limited to an occasional supervised visit.

When his son was about five (5) years old. This young man contacted me. He was now working at Goodwill and wanted more time with his son. I filed a Motion on his behalf for shared parenting and/or extended parenting times with

his son. The Court appointed a Guardian ad Litem who immediately advised me that he would oppose my motion as, in his opinion, a blind person was incapable of providing the care for a young child. My motion to have the Guardian ad Litem removed was denied. It should be noted here that the young man (Father) was also on methadone for pain as a result of the pain injury. He also lived **alone** in a house in Clintonville and took the bus to and from work every day.

The matter was scheduled for trial. I contacted the National Federation of the Blind in Ohio and met with several blind caregivers, several of whom were called as witnesses. One of whom was a stay at home mom who was both blind and deaf and cared for two (2) children. Also the doctor treating my client for pain was called as a witness.

The Magistrate, Guardian ad Litem, myself and the Judge that heard objections all agreed that this was the most educational trial we had all experienced. We learned that methadone was a very safe treatment for pain which was non addictive. We learned that blind parents can care for their children. We learned that special hangers, markers for food, the way the sun felt, the way shade felt and the sounds that are heard assist the blind in knowing what is around them, how to choose food and clothing. In the end my client was awarded shared parenting with his son which enabled him to have a meaningful relationship with him. It should be noted that even the Guardian ad Litem recommended shared parenting after observing my client with his son and hearing all the testimony. My client and his son developed a close and loving bond and the child was never harmed and more than adequately taken care

when in my client's care. My client was denied five (5) years of a meaningful relationship with his son due to the ignorance of those in charge and thoughts about a certain disability.

This Bill will protect those parents like my client who were denied the ability to bond with their children because of a misconceived notion of a disability and how it affects parenting.

I urge this committee to vote yes on this important bill.

Andrea Yagoda