

76<sup>th</sup> House District  
Richland County

Columbus Office

Vern Riffe Center  
77 S. High Street  
13<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Columbus, Ohio 43215  
(614) 466-5802  
(614) 719-3973 (Fax)  
[Rep76@ohiohouse.gov](mailto:Rep76@ohiohouse.gov)  
[www.ohiohouse.gov](http://www.ohiohouse.gov)



Committees

State & Local  
Government (Chair)

Economic & Workforce  
Development

Infrastructure

Insurance

Transportation

**Marilyn John**  
State Representative

Chairwoman Schmidt, Vice Chair Miller, Ranking Member Denson and members of the House Families and Aging Committee,

Thank you for allowing us to provide sponsor testimony for House Bill 14.

First, I want to say, we *do* have judges and magistrates in Ohio who recognize the importance of the bond between a parent and child and are doing their best to foster those relationships as they help couples sort through separations and divorce. Many of those judges support this bill as they have seen positive outcomes for children and families.

House Bill 14 requires a presumption that parents share time and responsibility equally, unless there is evidence that an equal arrangement would be detrimental to the child. If such evidence is presented, the courts can use their discretion to formulate a more appropriate arrangement.

But equal parenting should always be the starting point because a strong parent/child relationship is in the best interest of children.

House Bill 14 encourages parents to work together instead of incentivizing them to fight against each other. Currently, we have a winner-loser system where children are often caught in the middle having to choose between parents or being used as pawns in a conflict. Until this system changes our children will continue to lose.

Further research will be provided during proponent testimony, but the premise of the bill originates from over 40 years of research into child development and well-being related to equal shared parenting. Beginning custody proceedings with a presumption of equality will protect children from the trauma of parental deprivation and set them up for a greater chance of success in life.

Children raised in single parent households, without the involvement of the other parent, especially fathers, are at the highest risk of delinquency, suicide, mental illness, incarceration and poor performance in school... and that's just the short list.

We need to protect our children and allow them to grow with the guidance and care of both of their parents and we need to remove the roadblocks preventing that from happening.

I would like to address a few common concerns and myths about equal parenting:

## State Representative Marilyn John Ohio House of Representatives

- **An equal presumption would create a “cookie-cutter” approach to custody.** HB14 merely creates a standard from which courts must begin when deciding the amount of time and responsibility a parent has with their child. Ohio already uses a "cookie-cutter" approach with standard parenting time orders and the state’s default to assign custody to only one parent. HB14 is merely creating a *new* starting point that is fair and protects the parent-child relationship.
- **Equal parenting isn’t appropriate when parents don’t agree or are in conflict.** Actually, research has shown the opposite; that equal parenting provides a sense of balance to the child’s world and gives them security even when there’s parental conflict. Equal parenting has also been shown to *reduce* parental conflict and encourage collaboration between parents.
- **HB 14 will force courts to give equal custody to abusers.** Since safety of children is of utmost importance, the bill allows the presumptions to be rebutted when there is evidence of domestic violence and child abuse. The courts will use the same factors they are already using under current law. In other words, an unfit parent now will still be deemed unfit under HB14.
- **Claims that equal presumptions increase domestic violence and child abuse.** There is a growing body of evidence that suggests the opposite. The available data indicates that rather than fuel domestic violence between the former partners, presumptions of shared parenting *reduce* the incidences of domestic violence. Available statistics from Kentucky and Spain bear this out, as well as preliminary data from Arkansas, where a “clear and convincing” standard is used.

Even more interesting, when we compare Ohio counties with 50/50 to those with an every other weekend type standard, those counties with equal or nearly equal parenting time rules have consistently shown lower, and declining, rates of child abuse and neglect.

None of us want to endanger children or protect abusers, which is why the bill creates an exception. But parental deprivation is *also* harmful for children and leaves scars that can last a lifetime. A child’s relationships with their parents also needs to be protected.

## State Representative Marilyn John Ohio House of Representatives

According to data from ODVN and the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, in Ohio women and men experience domestic violence at nearly the same rates. Also data from the maltreatment report issued by the US Department of Health and Human Services shows that mothers are more often the perpetrators of child abuse and fatalities than fathers. Therefore, to presume that men and fathers are more dangerous and women and mothers are always safe is a false assumption. The best approach is to allow factual evidence to be presented and considered, and not presume one parent is more fit than the other.

For many single parents, equal parenting will allow then the ability to better provide for their children and families. An unequal distribution of responsibilities and time doesn't help anyone, especially the children. House Bill 14 aims to remedy that.

There are supplementary materials, including research regarding equal parenting, in the folders provided. Thank you again for your consideration and we will be happy to answer any questions.