

Proponent Testimony- HB14  
Testimony of Detrick Johnson Jr  
513-884-6687; Detrickjohnson@gmail.com

Ohio House Families and Aging Committee  
March 14, 2023

Chairwoman Schmidt, Vice Chair Miller, Ranking Member Humphrey, and members of the House Families and Aging Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on HB14.

### **Introduction**

My name is Detrick Johnson Jr, I am a loving African American father, resident of Cincinnati OH. I have a seven-year-old son from a previous relationship and a 4-year-old daughter with my wife. I graduated from the University of Cincinnati with a bachelor's degree in criminal justice and a Masters in coaching education from Ohio State University. I am the executive director of a foster care program and residential treatment facility for boys. I serve the most underprivileged population in America with passion, hope and determination to make a difference.

### **Comments**

I have witnessed and experienced firsthand the damage created by inequality of the Ohio family court system. This system which is supposed to have the best interest of every child in mind, at a fundamental level creates disparities between parents based upon implicit biases, unfair statutes and often perpetuates a false narrative of father's lacking a deep paternal instinct that bonds them with their child(ren). These are only a few of the common challenges that fathers are often confronted with if they are seeking to be an equal active parent.

The lack of equality in the family court system produces a disservice to not only children but to society. Children who feel a closeness to their father are twice as likely as those who do not to enter college or find stable employment after high school, 75% less likely to have a teen birth, 80% less likely to spend time in jail, and half as likely to experience multiple depression symptoms (J.B. 2022). These statistics indicate the dire importance of the role a father has in a child's life. Ohio family courts diminish this role by assuming mothers are more integral to child development and are better suited as parents, creating major disparities in the rate that fathers are delegated non-custodial visitors.

HB14 supports a new standard starting place for both parents while encouraging parties to treat each other as equals who both desire the best interest of their child(ren). I cannot emphasize the importance of both parents being viewed and treated as equals. Mothers and Fathers both play an instrumental role in proper development of children. Statistics indicate that children of

fatherless homes experience a staggering negative effect on their overall well-being, mental and behavioral health. 90% of all homeless and run away children, 63% of teen suicides and 85% of children and teens with behavioral disorders all come from fatherless homes ( Brewer, 2022).

It is extremely important that family courts establish parity between parents, reinforcing participation in equal decision making for their child(ren). The American family structure has changed over the last few decades. 50% of marriages will experience divorce leaving children with uncertain futures of receiving equitable time with both parents. In addition, the proportion of births to unmarried women has drastically increased from 5% in 1960 to 41% in 2011 (Child Trend Data Bank 2013). The courts must take these statistics into consideration. As the family structure has changed, statutes must change as well.

## **Experience**

Fathers have traditionally been placed in a box with unfair stereotypes, which I have personally experienced directly from current statutes and reinforced by magistrates. I have been told “Children love their mothers more” directly from a magistrate. I was astounded at this comment while knowing it was frivolous and had no true factual support, but I still had to endure this bias from a person who had direct decision-making authority in my case. Other statements said in jest including “boys really love their moms” or monologues from a magistrate about remembering her personal hardships as a single mother, before deciding on important factors in the case. For over 6 years, I have had to fight an uphill battle where my ability to parent has been questioned based upon untruths and no factual evidence but when mountains of evidence showcasing positive parenting skills are presented, it is ignored and overlooked. Across the state, unmarried mothers can easily maintain full legal custodial rights and burden of proof is typically on the other parent to prove best interest factors for shared parenting. This unfair standard literally creates a scenario where fathers must pay a price to just “legally” be a part of their biological children’s lives. Many fathers do not have the means to navigate this complex system and then cope with the impending doom of receiving no decision-making rights and a standard parenting schedule where they repeatedly miss out on chunks of their child’s life. This standard is far below subpar of what children deserve. How can one effectively parent with a standard such as this? Children suffer because they begin to establish a perception of their parent as a visitor rather than an actual parent. The opportunities to have a consistent influence are so limited that the non-custodial parent’s impact to the child is undermined. Ohio children are currently being deprived of full relationships with both fit and loving parents due to archaic local parenting rules and biases, instead of the courts starting with equal presumptions that are the best interest of the child(ren). It is past time to usher in a new era for thousands of families going through this system. Please support HB14, Ohio children are counting on you.

## References

J. B. (2022, February 15). *Fatherlessness and its effects on American society*. Americanfirstpolicy. Retrieved March 6, 2023, from <https://americanfirstpolicy.com/latest/20220215-fatherlessness-and-its-effects-on-american-society>

Kramer, Stephanie. "[U.S. Has World's Highest Rate of Children Living in Single-Parent Households](#)." Pew Research Center, Pew Research Center, 28 May 2021.

National Center for Fathering. [Fatherlessness Epidemic](#), National Center for Fathering. Accessed March 3. 2023.

United Fathers of California. (n.d.). Statistics. Retrieved from [http://unitedfatherssocial.org/?page\\_id=14](http://unitedfatherssocial.org/?page_id=14)