

## PROPONENT TESTIMONY – HB14

### TESTIMONY OF Russ Abrams

#### Single Father with 50% Visitation and 0% Custody

#### FAMILIES AND AGING COMMITTEE OHIO HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, 135TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY

MARCH 14, 2022

Chair 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

Russ Abrams, originally from New York, resident of Bexley, Ohio for 14 years. Banking Executive, Lean Sigma Master Black Belt and Army Veteran. Graduated from Indiana University in 1998 with a degree in Policy Analysis, was the Director of Tax Analysis for the State of Indiana and then a researcher at Harvard Kennedy School of Government covering topics on Sexual Trafficking, Education and Housing. The last 22 years I have been focused on improving processes and technology at an assortment of businesses around the world. Started a Non-Profit in Columbus called May We Help, creating inventions for children with disabilities allowing them to perform a daily or activity with their peers.

#### COMMENTS

My name is Russ Abrams; I am a single father that has spent ten-plus years of litigation for what should have been a right of shared and equal time. Today my son has a consistent schedule. He has one week with his mother and one week with me. As a result of his new custody schedule, my son went from being quiet and having low self-esteem issues to being in plays, being class president, and being in the gifted program. I wasn't going to speak here today until I shared my story with a co-worker that went through the same struggle; he didn't get his son 50-50, he barely got to see him, and unfortunately, the effects of his divorce were permanent; his son committed suicide a few weeks after turning 17. He said I was lucky. I never considered myself lucky; I knew my son's life and mine would be shattered forever if I lost him and if I stopped at the first false accusation; I just never thought I would be fighting for his life. He is 12 now, and I have another six years of this person using her son as a pawn.

I testified last year and heard a professor of child psychology at OSU discuss that 40 years of research show how important it is to keep children with both parents. We discussed known facts of an archaic court system, and all agreed it needed to change. I discussed how the rest of the world is changing how they handle divorce. The use of AI and Apps makes default custody time 50/50, even removing child support calculations and splitting child costs. Especially today, when in divorce cases the women are making more than the men, or we have same-sex couples. Other states are changing and seeing the benefits of reducing court time, making

amicable approaches to separation instead of a winner takes all mentality. They are replacing GALs, (attorneys) with social services and effective peaceful plans.

Amica is an online mitigation tool used in Australia, each parent pays \$50, and the app can develop a divorce decree for more than 25% of those that use it, with both parties accepting the terms and never having to step into a courtroom. The APP is required to be used first for all couples filing for divorce in Australia. The average cost of divorce in Ohio is \$25K per person. I am happy to assemble an even better APP in Ohio for all couples filing in Ohio. We must teach our children to use words and focus on peaceful resolution instead of non-stop accusations and violence.

Last year I listened to horrifying testimonies of people losing their children through false accusations, and when it came to me to speak, I didn't lose my child; my child didn't overdose or cut themselves. Instead, my son had me in his life, and his confidence soared. The bully that picked on him is now his friend. My son and I were lucky I could afford to spend over \$350K on a custody battle.

Reflecting on last year's testimony, I feel it was like trying to take down the Tobacco lobby. Proving that smoking is deadly, but because of the campaign donations, there was no way the federal government would ever ban it.

We saw firsthand as the divorce attorneys fought to keep their power and profits intact. We see the effects of not having a father in the home, higher crime rates, drug addiction and mental anguish. The children in every one of your districts that died of suicide and overdosing who had their parents go through the current divorce process; don't have a lobbyist. Unfortunately, these children don't have a PAC and won't be donating to any campaigns.

I know our laws will eventually change; I'm not sure when or if we will be the last state to change. But I know statistics; I do know this; by not acting now, each of you will be affected and will know someone whose child has suffered due to a custody battle.

If this committee is sincere about stopping the problems plaguing our families, they will use the data to map back these cases to the courtroom and cases that separated a child from a parent. The data will speak for itself. It always does. Could you imagine if each justice had to go to the funeral each time a child died of suicide that had a custody hearing in their courtroom? They would be held to a standard, a standard that does not exist today but with this Bill we will save these kids.

We must take children out of the divorce equation. Can you imagine a child's world it consists of two parents, and you are taking one away? You are messing up that child for life. If you think two weekends a month gives them a parent, we are fooling ourselves and cheating our children out of a safe and stable life.

By making 50% shared custody the default except in cases of abuse and addiction, we can. I spoke to abuse victims; this strengthens their case so that the abusive parent never gets equal time. It also punishes those that make false allegations to prevent misuse of the future system.

I have attached my previous testimony and an article reprinted with permission from the Economist that supports my statements and provides additional details on how the divorce process is changing.

Chair Schmidt, and members of the committee, thank you again for allowing me to provide testimony on HB 14. I would be happy to answer any questions.