

Laura Bellini

House Families and Aging Committee Opponent Testimony on HB 14

March 21, 2023

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written opponent testimony on H.B. 14.

My name is Laura Bellini, and I reside in the Cleveland area.

H.B. 14 focuses on a parental entitlement model rather than a child-centric model. Currently, Ohio courts allocate parental rights and responsibilities and parenting time using the best interest of the child standard. In determining the best interest of a child, courts must consider relevant factors to include age, distance, work, school, and extracurricular schedules, among others, when making custody determinations.

H.B. 14 presumes equal decision-making and equal parenting time unless the preponderance of the evidence shows that equal parenting would be “detrimental” to the child. Creating a one-size-fits-all parenting division regardless of the child’s circumstances is harmful. Not only are best interest factors ignored, cases that involve substance abuse, domestic violence, child abuse, and sex abuse, where a court may limit or terminate parenting time to an unsafe parent, are also ignored. Further, no other states utilize a detriment standard in place of a best interest standard.

The vast majority of custody arrangements are settled out of court. The small percentage that are adjudicated typically involve complex issues, including abuse. Research shows that about 90% of custody cases are resolved without significant court intervention. Among the 10% of cases that are litigated, approximately 75% involve reports of domestic violence. These cases need courts to make careful custody determinations that are safe for children.

I urge you to vote no on H.B. 14 and maintain judicial discretion on a case-by-case basis in the best interest of Ohio’s children.