

I am Susan H. Robinson, a Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor in Ohio, in practice since 2005, now semi retired. My son is pushing 50, and I have no grandchildren. So I will not personally benefit or lose anything as a result of whatever happens to this bill. I will, however, have to live in a world in which our children are treated with even less respect and protection than they are given now, and that is not acceptable.

The last time I testified in-person about issues involving custody was around 1992; I spoke in favor of children age 12 and older continuing to be allowed to choose which parent they would live with. A compromise was reached, in which that age of election was eliminated, but children of any age were allowed to express an opinion and have that considered. I saw that work well when a friend's young daughter asked to speak to then-Judge Ronald Solove. Meantime, a bill was being proposed way back then to force shared parenting on anyone who could not agree on parenting arrangements. I laughed, thinking there was no way anything so ridiculous could become law. Everyone knows that the very worst situation for shared parenting is when the parents do not get along.

And yet here we are.

As a counselor, I have seen children used by abusive parents as a weapon to extend the abuse beyond the parents' breakup.

It is not unusual for victims to stay in an abusive situation for fear of having to leave their children unprotected with that same abuser. Time was when we could leave an abuser both to protect our children and to show them that such behavior is not acceptable.

In some extreme cases, children will be vulnerable to kidnapping or even death at the hands of that abuser.

It is not as if protective parents can file reports and everything will be hunky-dory. The reality is, in most cases where a spouse and/or children are being abused, the victims will not report it—at least as long as they are living under the abuser's roof—due to fear of retaliation. And once they leave, if that the is first report the courts hear, it looks like the victim is making it up for some ulterior motive.

Overwhelmingly, victims are telling the truth and, if anything, tend to understate the danger.

I do not oppose shared parenting; but it only works if BOTH parents are on board. Anything less is a setup for failure. Unfortunately, far too many nonresidential parents suddenly discover the appeal of shared parenting at the exact minute that they learn it will reduce their child support obligations.

It is not in the best interest of any child to be passed back and forth between parents who are constantly at war. Or who live in different school districts. Or to be shuttled equally between two homes when they only feel safe in one of them.

What if one parent is hugely irresponsible or downright abusive to the child? Does this parent have equal parenting rights until this is proven? Does the child need to be injured before anything changes?

I am not a young woman. I am 75 years old, and grew up in an era when children's opinions about their own living arrangements mattered, as they should. Many children did not want to be responsible for that decision, and that was respected too. Believe it or not, from the time of my divorce when my son was 6 years old until he became of age, my custody agreement was "reasonable visitation." The only problem I ever had with that was that his father didn't bother to see him enough.

I notice that HB 14 includes provisions to penalize parents who make false allegations of abuse. We already have laws on the books against filing false reports. And I have already addressed the fear protective parents have about reporting.

Many victims going into court are not yet even aware of how to define what is going on. They do, however, have a strong sense that their children need and deserve protection—the protection they cannot get when parenting is shared with someone whose concern is that parent's rights and not the children's. The only way children are protected in a shared parenting situation is if NEITHER parent has abusive tendencies, BOTH parents have entered into the

Testimony Against HB 14 (forced shared parenting)

arrangement WILLINGLY, and both have a desire to cooperate in the best interests of their children.

Anything less is a travesty.