



**COURT OF COMMON PLEAS**  
**JUVENILE DIVISION**  
COUNTY OF CUYAHOGA  
9300 QUINCY AVENUE  
CLEVELAND, OHIO 44106

NICHOLAS J. CELEBREZZE  
JUDGE  
216.443.8415

**House Families and Aging Committee**  
**Judge Nicholas J. Celebrezze**  
**Opponent Testimony on House Bill 14**  
**May 14, 2024**

Chair Schmidt, Vice Chair Miller, Ranking Member Denson, and members of the House Civil Justice Committee, I thank you for this opportunity to submit opponent testimony for House Bill 14 on behalf of the Ohio Association of Juvenile Court Judges.

As a former Member of the House and current Judge on the Cuyahoga County Court of Common Pleas, Juvenile Court, I want to first thank the bill sponsors for their work on this legislation, and also their commitment to further fostering parent child relationships, of both mothers and fathers in our state.

However, I write to you in opposition of this bill for many reasons. While this bill brings light to a very important issue involving the importance of both parents in the upbringing of a child, it does so in a way that still is too much of a departure of our current standard of best interest of the child, not of the parent. Not only is this standard one that has been used for decades in law and jurisprudence not only in Ohio but nationwide, but one that is sound in ensuring that the needs of children that are already going through a difficult time are protected.

While much of the debate on this bill has focused on divorce cases, mostly handled in our State by the Domestic Relations Court, our Juvenile-only Courts see a wide range of issues when unwed parents separate, causing unique parenting issues that are vastly different and require a separate analysis. While I realize this is a “generalization” we need to recognize that often in divorce cases the parents have years of familiarity which allows the courts to help maintain some sense of status quo for the sake of the children. This is quite different in the private custody cases that juvenile court sees, where sometimes these parents have had very little interaction with one another and have not had any co-parenting prior to coming to court.

The bill’s presumption of equal parenting responsibilities and equal parenting time applies in these cases involving unmarried parents. The presumption even applies to temporary initial orders before paternity has been established. This is especially concerning to juvenile judges who see an increasing number of cases involving unmarried parties where one parent has no parenting record or relationship with their children. If this bill passes, parents who have had little to no contact with their children will be presumed to receive equivalent parental decision-making and equal parenting time as the sole-



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caregiving parent, all without any fact-finding done by the court as is customarily done now. This mandate also has long lasting unintended consequences for both parents and children alike, ranging from work considerations of the parents, school and extracurricular activities of the child, social interactions with classmates and peers, tax implications and school placement issues, and even geographic issues depending on the distance that parents reside away from one another.

Current law solely focuses on the best interest of the children, a legal principle that all Judges, but especially those handling juvenile court matters, base all our decisions on. Sub. H.B. 14 requires equal decision making and equal parenting time unless the preponderance of the evidence shows that equal parenting would be detrimental to the child, not only a complete shift from current law, but basically the creation of an entire new legal standard, and one that to the best of my knowledge no other state utilizes. As written, this bill will surely lead to an increase in disputes between parents, friction with the court system, and substantial increase to litigation costs of the parents, which unfortunately and often then is taken out on the children subject to this matter thus hurting the parent child relationship, the very thing this bill hopes to improve.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in writing in opposition to H.B. 14 and thank you for your continued service to our State.

Yours in Service,

Judge Nicholas J. Celebrezze  
Cuyahoga County Court of Common Pleas  
Juvenile Court Division