

To whom it may concern,

Please listen to the voices of domestic abuse survivors and their children. I am opposed to any proposal that creates a "presumption of equal parenting and decision making" which puts the rights of parents over the best interests of a child. I am a single, physically disabled mother of two young boys who endured many years in an abusive marriage.

I am a survivor and my children are survivors of abuse as well. In cases like mine, it is absolutely critical for our judges to have the case by case discretion to be able to advocate in the best interests our children. This allows so many parents to create safety for our children! Please please do not allow this bill to move forward. This bill hurts domestic violence survivors like me, and especially our children, placing insurmountable burdens on us and exposing children to further abuse by giving the abusive parent immediate access to the children and unfairly burdening the victim of abuse with rebutting this presumption. You will be asking victims of abuse to do something that can put them in greater harm. There is always backlash with abusers. It is also well-documented that abusive parents frequently use family courts as a means of continuing their abuse post-separation to hurt and control their former partners by taking away or harming the children. Abuse does not end at separation or divorce.

Many cases settle but this would force many more to litigate as the only way to fight the presumption of 50/50 by proving there is abuse and danger to the children. But there are so many who are financially able to litigate. What will they do? With the many barriers that are imposed by this bill, many women may simply choose to just stay with their abusers, because it is very hard to prove abuse in many situations, which would also keep children in abusive situations.

Ohio's children deserve safety-focused legislation. One such legislation would be the bipartisan "Keeping Children Safe from Family Violence Act." As Congress has now recognized, many U.S. children – estimates are in the tens of thousands - have been put at risk and even killed by a dangerous parent, many after a family court rejected abuse evidence and safety concerns voiced by a protective parent. The center for judicial excellence tracks data, and reports that 986 children in the US (39 in Ohio!) have been murdered to date by a divorcing or separating parent since 2008. 139 children in the US (7 in Ohio!) were killed in preventable cases where there were family court failures.

<https://centerforjudicialexcellence.org/cje-projects-initiatives/child-murder-data/>

We cannot afford to get this wrong. Presumption should not guide these decisions. Please move to protect survivors of abuse like myself and my two boys, 6 and 10. The Keeping Children Safe from Family Violence Act provides federal funds to the states that improve their child custody laws to better protect at-risk children.

I am pleading with you to stand against oppression and protect the weak and vulnerable! Please do not support the latest version of HB 14. Instead, look at proven solutions that address the dangers of domestic violence for the survivors and their children navigating the family court system.

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