

**To the Members of the Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee,**

**Re: Opposition to Senate Bill 174**

I urge you to **oppose Senate Bill 174**.

I would like to share my experience with the Cuyahoga County Domestic Relations Court to illustrate how the current family court system already fails many fit and loving parents—particularly fathers—and how SB174 would make this worse.

In 2013, I filed for divorce after moving to Ohio two years earlier to begin work as a physician at the Cleveland Clinic. My ex-wife was also a physician, and we had two young daughters, ages 2 and 5. What followed was a painful lesson: the equality promised by the Constitution and fundamental to American life does not extend to fathers in family court.

I was told early on that in Ohio, a father asking for equal parenting time was asking for a fight—and would likely lose. Despite our being two capable, full-time working professionals, I was advised to consider myself lucky if I received anything near shared custody. After over a year of emotionally and financially draining litigation over what should have been a no-fault divorce, I was forced to accept a parenting schedule in which I had only **6 nights out of every 14** with my daughters.

Now, 12 years later, my daughters—now 14 and 17—do not view me as any less of a parent. In fact, they often question why they are required to spend more time with their mother than with me. They don't know how unequal the system is for fathers without means to endure lengthy legal battles. I'm grateful they've been spared the trauma of that process, but I remain saddened by how deeply flawed and self-serving the system is—enriching itself while deepening the emotional scars of families at their most vulnerable.

More than **90% of Ohioans** believe children deserve equal or near-equal time with both parents following a separation or divorce. And yet, **less than 1% of child support orders in Ohio reflect equal parenting time**. This stark disconnect reveals a disturbing truth: family courts routinely sideline one parent, often the father, regardless of fitness or willingness to co-parent.

Senate Bill 174 would make this worse.

- It **strikes the terms “parental rights” and “shared parenting”** from Ohio statutes.
- It **gives judges even greater discretion** to override parental agreements, injecting more subjectivity into decisions that should be based on clear legal standards and evidence.
- It **requires the court to name a “designated parent,”** which will only inflame conflict, reinforce bias, and perpetuate inequality.
- Worst of all, it allows courts to override the mutual judgment of **fit parents**, even when they agree on what's best for their child.

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- SB174 is **not** in the best interest of Ohio's children. If anything, Ohio needs legislation that affirms and protects a child's right to be raised equally by both parents after separation—something backed by **decades of research** showing that children thrive when both parents remain actively involved.

Please do not allow SB174 to move forward. Reform should aim to heal families, not deepen the wounds.

Respectfully,

**Aman Pande**

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