

Good morning/afternoon, Chair, Senators, and distinguished members of the Senate Judiciary Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

I am here to urge you to oppose Senate Bill 174 as currently drafted. My principal concern is its effect on children's well-being.

### **1. Children deserve stability and consistent relationships — not weekend visitors**

Our children do not thrive when one parent becomes an afterthought. If SB 174 passes in its present form, it essentially guarantees that one parent is relegated to “every other weekend” visitation (or worse) in many cases. That is a disservice to children and a misuse of state power.

- The bill directs courts to “maximize parenting time with each parent” if in the child’s best interest—but without the default expectation of equal meaningful time. What is the definition of “maximize” time? What is the goal? Isn’t the legislature’s role to give direction to the court system?
- Because the language is vague, in practice, many courts will interpret “maximize” in a narrow way, giving minimal time to one parent. This risk is real, and its outcome is predictable.
- What is the official definition of “the best interests of the child”?

Let me be clear: I deeply support courts protecting children in cases of abuse or neglect. But in normal, low-conflict cases where both parents are safe and responsible, children deserve equal contact with both parents. This bill undermines that.

When a child grows up visiting a parent “every other weekend,” the message they internalize is that one parent is optional. That erodes the bond, reduces accountability, and harms long-term emotional development. The longer that distance endures, the harder it is for children to sustain a real relationship.

### **2. Why do away with the verbiage “Parental Rights”?**

SB 174 replaces the language of shared parenting and parental rights and responsibilities with new terms: “parenting responsibilities.” Ever since Covid, there has been a wave going across the country recognizing the facts that parents are so important, many states are passing specific laws guaranteeing parental rights. Yet somehow the authors of this bill literally want to take away the actual words “parental rights.” What kind of message does that send to families?

### **3. Ohio will be going in the exact opposite direction as the rest of the country regarding the importance of both parents.**

5 states have already passed 50/50 Rebuttable Presumption bills – Kentucky, Arkansas, West Virginia, Florida, and my home state of Missouri. Why would Ohio want to go in the opposite direction?

#### **4. The path forward: child-first, clear, and fair**

Rather than this vague, court-centric framework, Ohio should adopt:

1. A presumption of equal or significantly equal time with both parents in fit cases (unless clear evidence compels deviation).
2. Clear, mandatory findings that a court must explain in writing every time it departs from substantial time or equal responsibility.
3. Independent legislative drafting, with input from parents, child psychologists, family law experts—not just court institutions.

#### **5. In closing**

SB 174, as drafted, pushes Ohio toward a future where one parent is consigned to the margins, children lose constant contact, and judges gain unchecked discretion, written by their own hand. That is not reform—it is overreach.

I ask you: support children, support fairness, support constitutional integrity. Reject SB 174 in its present form, or demand major amendments that restore meaningful relationships, transparency, and proper separation of powers.

Thank you for your time. I would be honored to answer any questions or provide additional examples.