

Written Testimony Opposing Ohio Senate Bill 174 (SB174)

Submitted by: Nicole Amill

To: Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee

Date: October 8, 2025

Chairman Manning, Vice Chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 174.

I come before you not as a policy analyst or political figure, but as a mother, survivor, and advocate who has directly experienced the failures of Ohio's family court system. I understand the stated intention of SB174: to prioritize child safety and support victims of abuse. However, I respectfully urge this committee to consider the unintended consequences of this bill as written, particularly its dangerous expansion of judicial discretion without mechanisms for oversight or accountability.

1. Expanded Judicial Discretion Without Guardrails

SB174 allows courts to allocate parenting responsibilities based on the "best interests of the child." On its face, this sounds reasonable. In practice, however, "best interest"

determinations have become a legal gray area, vulnerable to bias, inconsistent application, and misuse.

In many Ohio counties, judges and magistrates are already misusing their discretion, ignoring protective parents' evidence of abuse, disregarding custody orders, and collaborating with GALs or attorneys who have financial or political ties to one another.

SB174 would only widen this discretion without establishing standards, checks, or enforcement mechanisms to ensure such power is exercised lawfully and fairly.

2. SB174 Risks Further Weaponizing Domestic Violence Protections

The bill includes language allowing courts to limit parenting time to protect against physical, sexual, or emotional abuse. This too is well-intentioned, but in reality, many survivors already face retaliation in court for reporting abuse. Protective parents, particularly mothers, are often labeled as uncooperative or accused of "parental alienation" when they attempt to shield their children.

Under SB174, there is nothing to prevent these same misinterpretations from being codified into legal decisions. The bill does not mandate the use of trauma-informed evaluators. It does not define abuse or ensure that expert testimony from domestic violence professionals will be considered. Instead, it places the burden back on judges, many of whom are not trained in DV dynamics, to interpret survivor behavior without mandatory education or review.

3. Lack of Oversight and Recourse for Victims of Judicial Misconduct

Perhaps most concerning is what SB174 does not do. It does not include provisions for:

- Independent review of custody decisions involving abuse allegations
- Standards for recusal when judges or GALs have known conflicts of interest
- Sanctions for judicial officers who repeatedly ignore statutory guidelines
- A clear appeals process when a protective parent is wrongly punished

In a state where many protective parents are denied basic due process, and in some cases held in contempt for following court orders, this silence is unacceptable. We cannot expand judicial power without also expanding transparency, accountability, and meaningful access to justice.

4. Real Reform Requires Balance; This Bill Doesn't Deliver That

If Ohio truly seeks to protect children and survivors of domestic violence, we need balanced, enforceable, and trauma-informed reforms, not broader discretion for courts that already act without consequence.

I strongly urge you to reconsider SB174 in its current form and instead push for legislation that includes the following:

- Mandatory training in domestic violence and trauma for all family court personnel

- Independent oversight of custody decisions and GAL performance
- Clear criteria for limiting parenting time that protect against misuse
- Survivor-centered appeals processes and conflict-of-interest safeguards

Conclusion

SB174 may be presented as protective, but for those of us who have experienced the family court system firsthand, it reads like an expansion of the very power structures that have silenced and endangered us.

Children and survivors do not need more discretion from unchecked authorities. We need protection, accountability, and a justice system that does no further harm.

Please vote no on SB174 as currently written.

Respectfully,

Nicole Amill

538 Washington Ave.

Lorain, Ohio 44052

Nicoleamill7@gmail.com

(440) 752-0446