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**To the Members of the Ohio General Assembly:**

**Subject: Opposition to Senate Bill 174 – Protect Children’s Right to Both Parents**

Dear Members of the Ohio Legislature,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to **Senate Bill 174 (Allocation of Parenting Responsibilities)** in its current form. While the bill aims to update Ohio’s custody and parenting statutes, it poses serious risks to children and families by limiting fathers’ access to their kids and weakening opportunities for children to have meaningful relationships with both parents.

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**Why Senate Bill 174 Is Harmful**

**1. It replaces “shared parenting” with a fragmented model that may reduce access.**

SB 174 eliminates the current legal categories of *shared parenting* and *sole custody*, substituting them with a “designated parent” and a set of divided “parenting responsibilities.” This approach risks legally sidelining one parent—often the father—and reducing the time and decision-making power that parent has in their child’s life.

(Source: [JDSupra, “Ohio Senate Bill 174 and the Future of Shared Parenting”](#))

**2. It restricts judicial flexibility.**

Ohio’s current “best interest of the child” standard allows judges to consider each family’s unique circumstances. SB 174 introduces rigid structures that could limit a judge’s ability to tailor arrangements to what truly serves the child.

**3. It comes amid an already unequal system.**

Ohio ranks **44th out of 50 states** in the amount of parenting time fathers receive—averaging only **23.7% (about 87 days per year)**, far below the national average of 35%.

(Source: [GRL Family Law, “Where Does Ohio Rank in Co-Parenting?”](#))

**4. It risks entrenching existing bias.**

The new “designated parent” label may further reinforce bias toward the current residential parent, often leaving fathers marginalized. This conflicts with principles of fairness and equality in Ohio family law.

## 5. The Ohio Bar Association and legal experts have voiced caution.

Even the Ohio Bar Association has warned that legislative overreach into custody law may restrict judicial discretion and inadvertently harm families.

(Source: [Ohio Bar Association, “Statehouse Connection—Leave It to the Judges”](#))

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## What the Research Shows

- **Children thrive when both parents are involved.**

Studies consistently show that children benefit emotionally, socially, and academically from meaningful relationships with both parents.

    - *King et al., “Nonresident Fathers’ Contributions to Adolescent Well-Being”* ([NIH, PMC2239255](#))
    - *Carlson et al., “Coparenting and Nonresident Fathers’ Involvement”* ([PMC2831369](#))
    - *Altenburger et al., “Resident and Non-resident Father Involvement”* ([Frontiers in Psychology](#))
  - **Balanced parenting arrangements reduce conflict.**

Dual-residence and shared-custody models generally lead to lower inter-parental conflict and better emotional outcomes for children.  
(*Berman, “Children in Dual-Residence Arrangements,”* [Taylor & Francis](#))
  - **Restricting one parent increases instability.**

When access is limited, children often experience higher stress and weaker attachment bonds. Laws that curtail one parent’s role can cause long-term psychological and relational harm.
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## Recommended Legislative Safeguards

If the General Assembly proceeds with SB 174, it should be substantially amended to protect Ohio’s families:

1. **Affirm a rebuttable presumption for substantial involvement by both parents.**

Unless there is credible evidence of danger, both fit parents should receive significant parenting time.

2. **Require clear, evidence-based findings before limiting access.**  
Courts should provide written, fact-based reasons for any restriction, subject to periodic review.
  3. **Preserve shared parenting as a viable framework.**  
Even under new terminology, the law should uphold collaborative, integrated parenting plans.
  4. **Mandate mediation or co-parenting education before access is reduced.**  
These steps lower conflict and promote cooperation.
  5. **Guard against implicit bias.**  
The “designated parent” label must not create a presumption that one parent—usually the father—is less capable or important.
  6. **Ensure accountability and appellate review.**  
Transparency in custody decisions protects families from unjust outcomes.
  7. **Maintain strong protections in cases of abuse or safety concerns.**  
Limitations should be narrowly applied, evidence-based, and regularly reassessed.
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## Conclusion

Ohio’s children deserve access to both responsible parents, and fathers deserve a fair chance to remain active in their children’s lives. Senate Bill 174, as written, undermines that principle. I respectfully urge the Ohio General Assembly to **oppose SB 174 in its current form** or to adopt substantial amendments that preserve balanced parenting, judicial discretion, and the true best interests of children.

Respectfully submitted,  
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