

Written Opposition to Ohio Senate Bill 174

Submitted by: Christa Suever, Allen County, Ohio

Date: November 3, 2025

To: Members of the Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee

I am submitting this written statement in opposition to Senate Bill 174. As a mother and survivor of domestic abuse, I write on behalf of myself and my daughter, Leighton, who has also endured abuse from her father. I have personally lived through how the family court system in Ohio can fail to protect children in danger. In our case, after I reported the abuse, the court not only ignored the evidence but ultimately gave custody of Leighton to her abuser—solely because I had reported what happened. The system punished me for speaking up and rewarded the very behavior that caused harm. This experience has shown me how dangerous it is when laws emphasize shared parenting without addressing the real risks posed by abusive parents. While SB 174 aims to modernize Ohio’s family laws, its structure would only strengthen the same loopholes that left my child unprotected.

Concerns Linked to Bill Provisions

1. Presumption of “meaningful participation” by both parents

SB 174 establishes “a state public policy ... for each parent to have parenting time and participate in decision-making ... when it is in the child’s best interest.” (proposed R.C. 3109.0414 et seq.) Although it includes the phrase “best interest,” courts already fail to apply that standard consistently. In my own case, the court prioritized equal access over documented safety risks, ignoring police reports and professional assessments. This bill risks giving abusive parents a legal foundation to claim more time and authority, regardless of prior harm.

2. Elimination of “shared” and “sole custody” designations

SB 174 replaces “parental rights and responsibilities” with “parenting responsibilities” and repeals “shared parenting” and “sole custody.” (legislature.ohio.gov, key=25108) This removes vital distinctions that survivors depend on to limit contact. Judges would gain more discretion under looser terminology—meaning fewer guardrails and less transparency for families already fighting for safety.

3. Domestic-violence protections exist but accountability does not

While SB 174 allows courts to restrict parenting responsibilities when abuse is proven, it contains no provisions for accountability if judges disregard that evidence. Qualified immunity remains untouched. I have experienced firsthand how this lack of accountability leaves families like mine without recourse. When a court knowingly overlooks abuse, it effectively sanctions it—and survivors are left powerless.

4. Risk of retraumatization

SB 174 encourages parenting plans that “enable a child to enjoy a meaningful relationship with both parents” and to “maximize parenting time with each parent when it is in the child’s best interest.” (proposed R.C. 3109.0423) In practice, this means that even known abusers could continue to demand contact, forcing victims like my daughter back into harmful situations. For us, the court’s insistence on ongoing contact has prolonged trauma and undermined recovery.

Conclusion

For Ohio families like mine, reform must begin with accountability. Until qualified immunity is limited or removed, and until judges are held responsible for decisions that endanger children, no rewording of custody law will make the system safer. I respectfully urge this committee to reject SB 174 or to amend it to include explicit accountability, stronger domestic violence protections, and language that prevents any presumption of shared parenting in abuse cases. Leighton and children like her deserve safety—not forced contact under legislative oversight that favors abusers.