

Chairman and Members of the Committee,

My name is Nicole Amill, and I am a mother from Lorain County who has spent the past several years fighting to protect my child in a domestic relations case that has been riddled with conflict of interest, judicial bias, and misuse of discretion. I appear today for the second time now in my personal capacity, in strong opposition to Senate Bill 174, because this bill would give judges and guardians ad litem even more unchecked power, the same kind of power that has already destroyed my family's stability, my child's safety, and our constitutional right to due process.

Under current Ohio law, parents already struggle to get fair hearings in domestic relations courts. GALs are supposed to act in the best interests of children, but in practice, many operate with little accountability or oversight. In my own case, my child was removed from me based on false statements and without factual evidence, while the appointed GAL, who had personal conflicts and financial interests, used her position to isolate my child, interfere with school involvement, and even push for unlawful wage garnishments through the Child Support Enforcement Agency for her own fees.

Despite my documented indigence, and despite court orders acknowledging conflicts among judges and requiring recusal, the same individuals remained involved, enabled by the broad "discretion" that SB 174 now seeks to expand. When courts operate without oversight, discretion becomes a weapon, not a safeguard.

SB 174 contains language granting courts and GALs "complete discretion" to determine what is in a child's best interest. That phrase, complete discretion, is dangerous. It invites arbitrary rulings, selective enforcement, and retaliation against protective parents who raise concerns about abuse, medical neglect, or coercive control. I'm trying to navigate through the consequences of that kind of discretion.

My child since removal has declined in health. Has been physically and emotionally isolated, and deprived of contact with his siblings and extended family, all while the court ignored evidence and allowed the GAL's misconduct to continue unchecked.

If this bill passes, families like mine will have no path to relief, no means to hold biased actors accountable, and no protection against judicial or GAL misconduct. It will empower those who already abuse the system and silence those who are trying to protect their children.

I urge you to reject SB 174 and instead focus on legislation that increases transparency, requires disclosure of conflicts of interest, limits ex parte communication, and holds the judiciary accountable through independent oversight and financial audits and actual disciplinary actions can lead to removal of position.

Ohio families need protection from unchecked power, I speak for myself and many other of your constituents crying out to me daily. I have pics and video of abuse happening as we speak and this year. All inflicted after court involvement.

Thank you for your time and for considering the real-life impact this bill will have on parents and children who depend on your judgment to safeguard justice, not erode it.

Respectfully,
Nicole Amill
Lorain County, Ohio
Case No. 20NU088119