

Hello!

I moved to Ohio in January 2008. At the time of my move, I was married to my first husband. We divorced due to incompatibility. I met my second husband during the divorce of my first husband.

While married to my second husband, I endured several different forms of abuse. I was finally able to leave and go to a local domestic violence shelter in July 2021. It took over 8 years for me to get out of this abusive relationship. At a temporary custody hearing, I was awarded custodial and residential parent. The safety of my son is my number one priority. I'm fighting every day to ensure that he's safe by being with me the majority of the time. While most of the abuse that I endured wasn't physical; the mental, emotional, psychological, religious, financial, and sexual abuse haunts me. I hide it as best as I can from our son so that he may lead a normal and healthy childhood. I had tried to leave a couple of times prior, but my husband changed just long enough to convince me to stay. It wasn't until objects began flying, and threats of not knowing what's coming, that I finally found the courage to leave. I packed what I could into two suitcases, loaded my children into the car, and left without a word. I was scared for my life. I even questioned if I had done the right thing for weeks after I'd left. I cried, a lot! I feared that he would find me; and you know what? He had a friend tell him my exact location. I was frightened all the time because I didn't know what he was capable of. I'd heard stories of his past, though. Terrible stories. I knew deep down what he was capable of, but I didn't want to face it in case it became a reality.

My youngest son and I were in our local DV shelter until December. We moved into our own home, with the help of local agencies, which is very close to my husband. I experience frequent nightmares. I check my locks frequently. I experience fearful thoughts and so many other trauma-related responses. My local PD patrols my street regularly, which helps some. However, the fear still remains. It always will be there. I'm working with several specialists to overcome these trauma responses and heal. There are many years of recovery ahead of me, and I don't want that for my son.

I'm still in the middle of my divorce, and it may not be finalized until later this year. My son's well-being has been, and always will be, a top priority for me. He's a child. He should not be subjected to the types of abuse I endured at the hands of someone he believes he can trust. I have seen the manipulation firsthand on the other children in the household, his own biological children. His oldest daughter moved out at 17 to get out from under the controlling tendencies of this man. His youngest daughter has endured yelling, extreme spanking, and controlling tendencies, too.

If HB 508 is passed, my son may be forced to be in an unhealthy and unsafe environment. He will be subjected to alcoholism and potentially be in the car with someone who is under the influence. His safety will no longer be guaranteed. He may be manipulated/alienated, controlled, yelled at, psychologically abused, and given things with an ulterior motive. HB 508 will have detrimental effects on survivors of domestic violence/abuse and their children. It will force the survivor to share their child with an unsafe individual, who could potentially injure the child or the survivor. It's another way for an abuser to remain in control over their victim.

I'm begging you to consider the repercussions this could have on survivors of domestic violence/abuse. This could be just as traumatic as the abuse they endured while with their partner. Giving the abuser the ability to control every situation and disagree on things that a child may need to thrive. I may be one person trying to overcome the trauma of what happened to me, and doing what I can to protect my son from it happening to him, but you are many. You have the ability to say, "No! This bill will do more harm than good to survivors. I will not stand for it!"

Please look deep within. Think about if it were your son or daughter in a domestic violence situation, and their partner wanted 50/50 parenting time to manipulate the situation. What would your reaction be to that? Put yourself in my position. Fighting everyday to hold a normal life in an abnormal situation. Holding onto hope that my son will have the freedom to be open and honest without any backlash or ulterior motives. Having a light shine to those who are in the dark of night; being the lighthouse for others.

My story is not unique, but it's mine. This is not even the tip of the iceberg of what has happened throughout my marriage. It's a minuscule glimpse into the reality that I called life for 8 years. Consider mine, and the other stories you're hearing, before making your decision to pass HB 508.

Thank you.