

PROPONENT TESTIMONY - HB508

TESTIMONY OF MICHAEL J. MCNEESE

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CIVIL JUSTICE COMMITTEE

OHIO HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, 134TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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Chairman Hillyer, Vice Chair Grendell, Ranking Member Galonski and members of the House Civil Justice Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on HB508, precisely as it is written. My name is Michael McNeese, from Lancaster, Ohio.

As a parent who has gone through the family court system for the past seven years, and spent a fortune at failed attempts to gain more equal parenting time with my children, I would like to briefly address the financial impacts we anticipate after the passage of House Bill 508.

In the U.S., family law is a \$50-billion-per-year industry¹. At a family law caseload rate nearing 3.1 million in 2020², the average family law litigant is spending an average of \$8,000 per year in attorney and legal fees. Ohio's share of family law caseload is 156,423². That adds up to Ohioans forking out an astounding \$2.5 billion in family law costs every year.

We proponents of House Bill 508 are confident that the passage of this bill will significantly reduce caseload and incoming litigation. This has already been evidenced in Kentucky after the implementation of their shared parenting bill in 2018. The parity of caseload between 2017 and the latest records of 2020 indicates a 9% drop in case and litigation rates³. Kentucky's bill has a weak preponderance standard of evidence. House Bill 508's stronger standards should see an even more drastic reduction in litigation and caseload. But, let's work with the conservative 9% reduction, which would mean that, under House Bill 508, Ohio families stand to save more than \$225 million per year.

In my own case, had House Bill 508 as written been in effect, my children's mother and I would have retained enough of our own money to completely fund one of our kid's college tuition, room and board. I spent tens of thousands to fight for the right to be a good dad for my kids. My ex spent the same trying to stop me. But, because of false allegations and my futile attempts towards getting more equal parenting time, we spent a fortune, needlessly, and to no positive practical effect. And, the case with myself and my children is still ongoing.

Also consider that during a separation, more often than not, one parent is forced out of their home. This doubles the expense burden of having and furnishing another home. A parent that only has their children 4 days a month still has to have the same furnishings in their home as the parent that has them a standard of 86% of the time. Meanwhile, unnecessary litigation drains parents' bank accounts from funds that could go to the betterment of their children's health and welfare.

It's not a secret that judges and magistrates commonly ignore the notion of equal shared parenting when one or both of the parents exhibits that they are high conflict, or are poor at communicating with each other. Attorneys know this, too. So, what we have is an incentivized system for one parent to purposefully be difficult, just to make the situation difficult, which protects their biased and advantaged parenting time order. This breeds a further increase in conflict, more litigation, and skyrocketing attorneys fees. All the while, innocent children lose out on resources, and companionship with a perfectly fit and loving parent.

Let's defund the family law industry. Let's invest in Ohio children and families. Pass House Bill 508 as written. Thank you.

(1) Family Law Industry Revenue: Divorce Corp., DC Book LLC

(2) Caseload data: Court Statistic Project, courtstatistic.org, less adoption litigation

(3) KY Caseload dynamics, Domestic Relations and Domestic Violence cases: https://kycourts.gov/AOC/Information-and-Technology/Analytics/Pages/Caseload-Monthly-by-Category.aspx?fbclid=IwAR0eGXaERrFw4-g1N2jbgq8DIAVDi-BobPZHQT8bS3H4DLZsUK4jY_HEEmU