

PROPONENT TESTIMONY - HB14

TESTIMONY OF ALEXANDER HAAS

Co-Founder, Stark County Parents United; Vice President, A Kids Right

FAMILIES & AGING COMMITTEE

OHIO HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, 135TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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Chairman Schmit, Vice Chair Miller, Ranking Member Humphrey and members of the House Families and Aging Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on HB14.

My name is Alexander Haas, I've been supporting victims of parental alienation and advocating for change in the Family Court system ever since my eyes were opened to it through my own experience with it in 2010. I have lived in Ohio most of my life only living in New York for University. I'm married now with 4 children with my wife and run a small business with a small chain of coffee-shops I founded in 2003. I volunteer in my community including being an active member of the Canton Planning Commission. In 2010 while I was the primary caretaker for my son of 4 and daughter of 2, they were abducted by their mother. We were not married so the police nor FBI would provide assistance. Only after I spent my savings and borrowed to get an attorney to file a series of court motions did I get to be with my son and daughter again at all. Realizing the travesty and damages routinely endured by children and parents I set out to improve things out of respect for that most sacred and fundamental bond between parent and child. I co-founded Stark County Parents United, which acts as a support group to parents alienated from their children by actions of the court or the other parent. I'm the Vice President of A Kids Right, a New York based 501c4 advocating to protect a child's right to access their parents, and have been an active volunteer for the National Parents Organization. The entire ordeal of losing access to my children and having to send them away as they would cling to me crying has devastated me. Now, years later, I rarely see them and have lost their affection. But I'm a capable adult and can advocate for myself. Ohio's children cannot advocate for themselves and need to be advocated for. HB14 is a step in that advocacy to protect all of Ohio's children from losing a parent.

I have met more than a hundred parents, fathers and mothers, devastated by being relegated to being a visitor in their child's life and confused as to the why or the justification for the court ordered alienation. Most are left feeling that they and their children were abused by a system they are powerless to fight and punished if they try. Many are fearful of punishment from the court even they discuss or make the facts of their case public. The story of Ohio's Dan Brewington is a prime example of why that

fear justifiably exists. In my own case , an online video was made about the courts actions in my case, the result, the Guardian ad Litem threatened to reduce or eliminate my time with my children. Of course the reason these courts don't want the public to know what they are doing is because it is shameful, legal, because the current legislation allows it, but shameful. To give you the most recent example in my own case, just last year, Judge Campbell ordered my time with my children be permanently limited to 4 hours on Wednesday and 9am – 4pm Saturdays. Why? Because “the court finds it is in the children’s best interest....until father better understands raising children.” (see attached order) this lack of requirements of evidence, lack of accountability, and unbridled discretion is a threat to all Ohioans. Any family court could order any parent’s children away from them with the same reasoning. I will also add that the Judge also conducted a hearing regarding this before I was even served with notice of it. After asking some attorneys if that is a due process violation, the response was “probably” “but that is how it is done all the time” (see attached docket). The US Department of Justice had recognized and wrote about this and similar family court issues in the Office of Access to Justice letter dated 3/16/2016 in which they wrote “the convening made plain that unlawful and harmful practices exist in certain jurisdictions throughout the country””common practices run afoul of the United States Constitution”

I do agree that this bill is imperfect, the language in this bill needs adjusted to strengthen it further and give more direction to the courts. The new “detrimental” standard in HB14 would likely be implemented by the courts in a similar manner as “child’s best interest”. Leaving the only major substantial improvement of this bill the increased standard of evidence. There is an existing standard that is clearly defined and outlined in Ohio case law of “unfitness”. HB14 should be adjusted to use the existing standard of whether a parent is fit or not. This should be simple, if you are a fit parent you are entitled to shared parenting with substantially equal time, however, if you are declared unfit, the court has discretion to order something else. Using this existing standard honed through years and years of case law gives more clarity to the court as to the intent of this legislation, which is also the will of the majority of Ohio’s parents.

The most significant effect this bill may not even involve the courts. But instead, what happens before the court system is engaged. When fathers and mothers understand that, chances are, once they separate they will enjoy substantially equal parenting, they will no longer be incentivized to degrade and attack the other parent. We shouldn't blame parents for fighting and even fighting dirty when they are afraid of losing custody of their child. The system that creates that incentive by creating a winner / loser system is to blame.

I believe in honor and truth. I believe in democracy and the rule of law – enough that I volunteered to die for my country when joining the Marine corps. When thrust into the Family Court I trusted that being compassionate and honest was the best course. I was wrong, with the way the system is, my children and I would have been better off if I had been dishonest and hostile. I hope that HB14 is passed so that in the future when parents come to me scared about losing their children I can suggest to them to simply be honest and a loving parent and the state will protect their bond with their children. I urge you to strengthen then pass this legislation to improve the clarity to Ohio’s courts regarding Ohioans beliefs and wishes in preserving and protecting the bonds of our parents and children.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you again for allowing me to provide testimony on HB 14.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alex Haas". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Alex" and the last name "Haas" clearly distinguishable.

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