

I am sure I is pretty obvious that I am not the average young parent. Let me make it clear, though, that that is no reason to ignore what I have to say. There is this one really important thing about older people: We vote. In my 76 years on this earth, I have never missed an election, not even a minor primary, since I reached voting age.

For some unexplainable reason, you keep bringing up this awful proposition, House Bill 14, to force 50/50 parenting on everyone who does not have solid proof their child is being abused by one parent. All in the name of parents' rights. Whatever happened to children's rights: Like the right to food, clothing, shelter, education, a safe environment?

This bill will have its greatest impact on a combative minority of families—the very families for whom 50/50 parenting is guaranteed to fail.

When my son was six and his father and I divorced, I had the extreme good fortune that the courts were mostly concerned with the Best Interests of the Child. I was granted custody and his father had “reasonable visitation” as I had consistently been the parent who provided the bulk of my son's care and nurturing.

Since my son's father tended to drink to excess, my attorney advised me to never put my son in the car with his father if the man showed up inebriated. (Fortunately, I never had to act on that.) Today, that same behavior would likely get me charged with contempt—for protecting my own child. Seriously, under any other conditions would you expect a parent to allow their young child to be driven anywhere by someone who was clearly inebriated? I certainly hope not. The same applies to exposing one's own child to any sort of danger.

When a child is being abused, it is often difficult or impossible to prove. And when a protective parent brings abuse up in court, it often makes that parent appear to be combative as opposed to the

actual goal of protecting their own child. The reality is that abuse is under-reported for numerous reasons, not the least of which is fear that the abuser will retaliate against the child.

These children are not creating the situation of their parents living apart, yet they are paying the full price for it. The way things are written now, a 17-1/2-year-old might be unable to do otherwise normal things thanks to a rigid parenting agreement: going to prom, earning spending money at a part time job, consistently maintaining their friendships – all thanks to having no say about which home they are in when. And that is BEFORE the introduction of H.B. 14. BEFORE they are unable to at least benefit from the court ruling on their specific situation as opposed to painting all families with the same broad brush.

The children did not create this situation, and we owe it to them to at least make it easier, not more difficult. And we certainly owe it to them to not put them in danger. After all, doesn't Children's Services already have enough to do?

Thank you.