

Good [morning/afternoon] members of the [Legislative Body],

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Shannon Avard, and I am here as an advocate for children's well-being. Today, I urge you to support three critical bills: the Rebuttable Shared Parenting Bill, the Time Taken, Time Back Bill, and the Three Strikes Bill.

Personal Experience

A friend of mine recently shared a podcast discussing the Rebuttable Shared Parenting Bill. After listening, I realized how much this bill, along with the Three Strikes Bill and the Time Taken, Time Back Bill, could have positively impacted my life and the custody battles I faced.

I have three children from two relationships. With the father of my two oldest children, I endured a custody battle that dragged on for six years after he misled me about temporary custody arrangements. During that time, he alienated our children from me, limited my time with them, and disregarded court-mandated rules. Despite my efforts to follow the law and maintain fairness, I had to repeatedly involve law enforcement to uphold the court order—only to discover that police required a judge's directive to enforce it, resulting in additional court proceedings and financial strain. This process felt like a legal and financial trap, enriching attorneys and the court system while undermining my ability to parent.

My second custody battle with the father of my youngest child involved false accusations to social services, further complicating the case. In one instance, a social services agent visited my home and ultimately confirmed the complaint was unfounded, acknowledging that these types of false reports are common. Tragically, my second son later took his own life—a heartbreaking outcome that I believe could have been prevented had the court system better protected his well-being.

1. The Rebuttable Shared Parenting Bill

This bill is founded on a simple yet transformative principle: children thrive when both parents are actively involved in their lives, except in cases where harm is evident. By establishing shared parenting as the default starting point, we are affirming a child's right to have meaningful relationships with both parents. This bill would have prevented the alienation I experienced and ensured fairness from the outset.

2. The Time Taken, Time Back Bill

This bill ensures that any time unjustly taken from a parent will be restored, providing accountability and reinforcing the importance of honoring parenting time agreements. In my experience, lost time with my children was never addressed or compensated, leaving a gap that this legislation seeks to close.

3. The Three Strikes Bill

Child safety is non-negotiable. This bill implements a clear system of accountability for repeated violations of court orders, including patterns of abuse or neglect. Had this been in place, my children's father would have faced consequences for ignoring court orders, and my son might have been protected from the harmful environment he sought to escape.

Closing Remarks

These bills are not just policies; they are lifelines for families. They recognize that children deserve stability, safety, and the love of both parents whenever possible. By supporting these measures, you are taking a stand for a brighter future for North Dakota's children—one where their voices are heard, their rights are protected, and their well-being is paramount.

Please put our children first by supporting and voting for these bills. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Best Regards,

Shannon Avard



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