

Testimony in Support of the Rebuttable Shared Parenting Bill

Good [morning/afternoon],

My name is Paul Sastaad, and I am here to testify in favor of the Rebuttable Shared Parenting Bill. I have nothing personal to gain from this legislation; it is too late for me and my daughters. My sole purpose is to prevent others from experiencing the pain my family endured.

The foundation of this bill is simple: children are equally the responsibility and joy of both parents. Absent abuse or unfitness, there is no reason a fit parent should be denied equal time with their children. Research shows that children in shared parenting arrangements experience better outcomes in mental health, academic performance, and emotional well-being. Shared parenting also reduces conflict between parents, benefiting the entire family.

Another critical argument for this bill is the disparity in scrutiny. While I had to fight in court to prove I was a fit father, my ex-spouse's new partner faced no such evaluation. Despite being a stranger to me and the court, he spent more time with my daughters than I was allowed. This inequity is not only unjust but also puts children at greater risk. Research has consistently shown that children living with a non-biological male, such as a mother's boyfriend, are at a higher risk of abuse and exploitation.

Key sources underscore these risks:

1. **Child Welfare Information Gateway (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services)**
Highlights the increased risk of abuse in single-parent households.
2. **American Psychological Association (APA)**
Examines how family structure impacts a child's safety and well-being.
3. **National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC)**
Links family instability to vulnerabilities such as trafficking and exploitation.

In my case, a court-appointed parenting investigator recommended equal custody, yet the judge disregarded this. Afterward, I learned of potential conflicts of interest between the judge and my ex's attorney, raising serious concerns about bias in the family court system. I witnessed favoritism firsthand, including private interactions between the judge and opposing counsel during proceedings.

The current system undermines the children's best interest which is causing tremendous struggles for our children, families and communities. According to research published in the *Journal of Family Psychology*, children in shared custody arrangements report higher satisfaction with their relationships with both parents. A 2023 analysis by the Institute for Family Studies confirms that children in shared parenting arrangements fare as well as those in intact nuclear families.

This is not just a legal issue—it is a moral imperative. Children need the love, support, and presence of both biological parents equally. Being a parent doesn't stop when a marriage ends, and the law must stop treating fit parents like visitors in their children's lives.

It's time for a change. It's time for laws that reflect what research has proven: children thrive with shared parenting. Let's put children's needs above financial and institutional interests.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Paul Saastad



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