

Dear Chair, and Committee Members,

Thank you for your attention to this vital issue. My name is Brooke Sullivan. I'm a proud mom to four amazing children. Two are currently Dean's List student athletes at the University of Jamestown and our senior and sophomore remain home with my husband and I. I'm a Biology major, certified teacher and coach, and decorated former multi-sport college student athlete. I've loved teaching and coaching kids at all levels, college level down. My husband and I currently own and operate multiple successful businesses within the state.

I've worked diligently and been successful in many realms of life. Ultimately though, my passion, my desire, my focus in life has always been about kids. Everything, to me, ultimately circles back to, "What's the best thing, the right thing, for the kids".

Being a multi-generational, lifelong North Dakotan, raised on our centennial family farm, I always believed North Dakota was better and exceptional. When I'd occasionally hear stories of extreme injustice within court systems, I couldn't quite relate. I always knew North Dakota would do better, would be better...until I experienced it myself, firsthand.

For the past 10 years now, I've had to very much experience and watch myself and my entire family, my parents, my siblings, my kids, my nieces and nephews, have our hearts absolutely ripped out, time and time and time again, as my precious brother and niece have been unthinkably failed by every aspect of the "Family Court System", time and time again, over these past ten years. To say it's been a travesty of justice is an extreme understatement. I wouldn't have believed it could be this bad, and this wrong, had I not experienced it and continue to this day to experience it, myself.

With this current system, all that's needed is repeated false accusations to sever, in my case, my niece's access to 90% of her very loving, successful, upstanding family, my brother's whole side of the family, which makes up 90% of my niece's blood relatives. The court rulings have been all based on 100% false accusations made by a skilled manipulator mom, with clinically documented control and psychological issues, that the rookie judge fell for every time, with zero proof. In fact the judge had proof of perjury by the mom's mom, and banned her from the courtroom, but refused to take action on or consider that perjury regarding the credibility of those false accusations against my brother.

My brother and niece were both trapped in an abusive environment. He was repeatedly locked in the basement, lied to and about, and emotionally abused. My niece, since she's been able to express herself as a baby, has begged to have more time with and be with her dad, where she has peace, safety, and love. That only further fueled and enraged the mom. We have pictures of hand print bruises on my niece after she was forced against her will into court ordered time in the mother's care, drag abrasion marks on her upper knees, audio/video of her screaming for help, begging her dad, who was locked in the basement for help for hours. None of it mattered to the court or to CPS. False accusations have trumped all. My niece has been horribly failed by the system every step of the way.

My niece has been forced for 10 years now to spend the majority of her time, very much against her will, with her mom. Presents we gave and sent to our niece, were thrown away. She was denied access to the parties, communications, family gatherings, private violin lessons that she so eagerly wanted that my parents generously funded, and so much more...all was denied my niece by a vindictive mom. We had to force her screaming into vehicles, telling us she's scared and please she just wants to stay with her dad for so many years, to force her back to mom.

Recently my now almost 14 year old niece, wrote a letter to the judge explaining that she wants to spend the last 5 years of her life as a minor living with her dad after being forced to spend the first 13 with her mom, and some reasons why. She was so hopeful and excited to finally have a voice, so she thought. The judge's response was, "I'm not about to let a 13 year old kid tell me what to do". Think about that. Is this about a judge's ego, or about the best interests of the kids. A few generations ago, a 14 year old was expected to be quite competent and before long have a family of their own. Now my niece has zero voice in having access to her dad and 90% of her family. After the judge disregarded my niece's letter and wouldn't allow her to testify in court, my brother's lawyer then requested that my niece be allowed to step into judge's quarters with both lawyers present to speak to the judge that way. The mom refused to let my niece speak, devastating and again silencing her. After being forced to again go back with her mom, she was assaulted upon entering the apartment, by her mom and mom's mom, and her backpack raided and her phone and cash my brother had given her for food was stolen. Shortly after that, she attempted to run away. Her bedroom and bathroom doors have since been removed so she now has no access to privacy, space, escape. She just wants to be free. Her whole life, she's wanted to be free to be with her dad. That's not too much to ask.

How can this be a story from North Dakota? We need to do better, for the children. 50/50 needs to be the default for parenting within the legal system. It's only logical and statistics overwhelmingly show it's desperately needed for the kids to have that access to both parents for best outcomes. The current ND family court system is rife for abuse. In my case, it only took repeating 100% baseless, false allegations against my brother to cost him, and my retired parents, an obscene amount of money, with the hopes of finally achieving some level of justice for my niece and our whole family that's been devastated for over 10 years now with this tragedy...for what? For wanting to be a dad? For wanting to help his daughter/our niece? He's done nothing wrong. My niece has done nothing wrong. They both just want to be free.

Please, I ask you, plead with you, beg of you, to support and vote a strong yes on HB 1242. It's such a simple, common sense, and desperately needed fix to a broken system that's failing the kids. Please vote yes.

Thank you,

Brooke Sullivan