

**February 7, 2025**

**To: House Judiciary Committee**

**Re: HB1242**

**Chair and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,**

I am writing in regard to my opposition of House Bill No. 1242 relating to equal parental rights and responsibilities. After reading this proposed bill, I am concerned for my own family and the countless other parents and children in similar situations as ours and what passing this bill could mean for children of North Dakota.

My name is Tami Van Beek and I reside in Strasburg, ND, District 8, for the last 16 years. I have three children (ages 16, 13, 5) and have spent the last two years working through the North Dakota legal system and courts with the help of my attorney, to simply ensure their safety and well being. While the thought of automatic equal parenting and decision making for our children may seem fair and just to some, unfortunately this is not the reality or the case with many families, including mine.

**HOUSE BILL 1242** would presume equal residential responsibility and shared decision making. This means the Court would be required to order equal residential responsibility and decision making, unless the presumption is overcome. In my direct experience, overcoming this presumption can take years and tens of thousands of dollars to do. The vast majority of parents in my situation do not have the financial means or the support to do this to protect their children. Another very concerning issue with this bill is the fact that it also states "there is no presumption as to whom will better promote the best interests and welfare of the child." While this bill addresses domestic violence and sexual abuse, it does not address a multitude of other issues, such as alcohol or drug addiction/abuse or a parent's mental health to name a few. If this bill is passed, it could re-open countless current parenting plans, orders and judgments that parents like me have advocated for to secure stability, safety and the well being for our children. Our current laws are also what helped me secure primary residency and decision making for my children. This bill may also discard the educated opinions of judicial officers who have heard, seen, and weighed these factors to help decide what's in the best interests of the children, not what is wanted by a parent because they feel it should just be equal.

Have you heard the Bible story of King Solomon telling the mothers he'll just cut the baby in half because they can't come to an agreement? One mother is all for it, because she feels it's her right. The other mother falls to her knees and gives in, because she knows and wants what's best, but she wants to keep her child safe above all else. That story best depicts this bill in summary. I feel this bill is geared **ONLY** towards parental rights and would reverse measures put in place to protect these children. Passing this proposed bill would send a message that our children's safety and stability does not outweigh a parent's rights and would put parental rights over protecting and ensuring the best interests and welfare of the children of North Dakota.

I respectfully request that you vote a **DO NOT PASS** recommendation for this bill. I appreciate your representation, service to our state and its citizens. Thank you for your time.

Tami Van Beek