

Date: January 20, 2025

To: Diane Larson and The Senate Judiciary Committee

Subject: Support for Rebuttable Shared Parenting, Time Taken-Time Back, and Three Strikes Bills

Who We Are

The North Dakota Suicide Prevention Coalition (NDSPC) is a collective of educators, healthcare professionals, and public health experts dedicated to walking alongside individuals and families during their darkest moments. We work tirelessly to connect those in crisis and professionals seeking assistance to the 988 crisis line, while promoting mental health awareness and offering prevention training opportunities across North Dakota.

Through community partnerships, we foster hope, resilience, and healing by equipping individuals with the resources and education needed to support loved ones in crisis.

Why We Do It

Suicide remains a devastating reality in North Dakota. In 2022, our state experienced 184 suicides—the highest number on record—affecting individuals of all ages. Alarming, 6.2% of these suicides involved children aged 10–19, some of whom may have been deeply impacted by the trauma of parental separation or divorce.

As someone who lost a son to suicide ten years ago, I have witnessed firsthand the anguish and physical pain that can accompany such struggles. This is not just a statistic—it is a call to action.

Research consistently shows that children of separation and divorce who lack meaningful involvement from both parents face increased risks for depression, anxiety, and suicide. Parental alienation, financial stress from legal battles, and the loss of critical family relationships are devastating for children and parents alike. These are avoidable traumas, and it is our moral obligation to address them.

Break the Silence Report

The NDSPC stands in full support of the findings in the *Break the Silence* report, which outlines how shared parenting improves emotional stability and mitigates risk factors for suicide in children. Children thrive when they have the love, support, and presence of both parents. Removing half of a child's support system creates unnecessary trauma and reduces the protective factors needed to build resilience.

This issue is deeply personal. My son's family, including his children and grandchildren, have experienced the painful isolation caused by limited access to their loved ones. Events like Christmas, Easter, and milestones such as birthdays and first communions are no longer celebrated together due to the circumstances surrounding parental alienation.

Why These Bills Matter

The Rebuttable Shared Parenting, Time Taken-Time Back, and Three Strikes bills are essential tools for promoting the emotional health and safety of our children. By ensuring fair, equitable

shared parenting arrangements and holding accountable those who violate court-ordered parenting time, these bills protect children from preventable trauma and build a foundation for their emotional and mental well-being.

The passage of these bills will not only strengthen families but will also save lives by addressing the root causes of stress, alienation, and despair that too often lead to tragedy.

We urge you to vote in favor of these measures and join us in building a future where every child in North Dakota has the chance to thrive, supported by both parents and their extended families. Together, we can break the cycle of trauma and save lives.

Thank you for your time and your dedication to the well-being of North Dakota's children.

Sincerely,

Kora Dockter

CEO, CVO

North Dakota Suicide Prevention Coalition

Alison Traynor

President

North Dakota Suicide Prevention Coalition