

From:
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To:
Senate Committee on Judiciary
Chairperson Senator Floyd Prozanski

CC: Senator Laurie Monnes Anderson and Representative Carla C. Piluso

Re: SB-318 Relating to parenting time in family law proceedings.
Public Hearing on be held on March 6, 2019

My name is Elijah Goodrick. I am a 42-year-old analyst with a large municipal government and a resident of Gresham (Senate District 25, House District 50). Apart from work, I spend my free time playing table-top games with friends and family and I work two afternoons a week for the after-school program at one of the local middle schools. Above all this, I am a husband and a father of 3 teenagers.

It is my sincere belief that our role in raising the next generation is the single most powerful tool we as citizens have for the betterment of our culture. I believe that it is my role as a father to love and care for my children and instill in them a good work ethic and a solid moral compass so that as they grow into adulthood, they can be a positive influence to their peers and on society as a whole.

Unfortunately, with the current wording of ORS 107, I have been relegated to a secondary role in the lives of my children for no other reason than the whims of officials within the Multnomah County Family Services.

I whole-heartedly support SB-318.

I was first married in 1995 to the mother of my children (hereinafter Mother). In 2003, we had our first child and in 2005 we had twins.

In 2006, I completed my Master of Arts in Teaching, and we moved to Southern California so Mother could begin a Ph.D. program in History. During our time in California, Mother's behavior began to shift toward abusiveness consistent with someone with Narcissistic or Borderline Personality Disorder (gas-lighting, psychological abuse, not being permitted to sleep, constant berating, being told I had little

or no value, being physically trapped in the home, being yelled at for multiple hours, threats of suicide, etc.). I began to develop a serious case of Depression/Anxiety resulting in frequent panic attacks and an inability to maintain control over my emotional state, either at home or while trying to teach. It is important to note that never once did I raise a hand to her or my children. It was also during this time that Mother began down a path towards alcoholism.

By 2009, I had enough and asked for a divorce. Shortly thereafter, I discovered that she had been having an affair with my best friend and her own sister's husband. The divorce proceedings went by with no more than the expected amount of drama. My own mental health began to improve significantly upon extricating myself from the abuse. Unfortunately for me, these improvements came too late to salvage my teaching career and I was forced to move back to Oregon to seek gainful employment. Our California divorce decree took into account the possibility of our being able to live in the same area and included a provision of equal parenting time should the situation allow.

I commuted to California from Oregon for a year to see my children on a regular basis. Mother's father passed away and she decided to return to Oregon to be near family. After giving her time to settle in, I provided notice per our agreement to begin the shared parenting time. Mother refused to comply. As a result, I was forced to file a motion with the courts to enforce our agreement, and the existing agreement for 50/50 time was upheld through the California court system.

Immediately following this case (2011), Mother filed a motion to change venue to Multnomah County, and filed for full parenting time with supervised visits only, accusing me of abuse towards my children. Mother was able to manipulate DHS into a founding an accusation of "Threat of Mental Harm" against me which resulted in separating me from my children completely. This decision was reversed by the courts and my children's access to both their parents was restored while we awaited the report from our custody evaluator.. After a year, the original decision to have my children spend equal time in both homes was upheld.

By 2013, Mother had been able to secure regular part-time employment and was remarried, which rendered the existing child support payment as a no-longer-valid calculation by several hundred dollars. My attorney and I requested that we file the modification outside the courts but Mother refused. We therefore filed the modification with the Multnomah County Courts. In an act of overt retaliation (Mother explicitly stated as much in an email to me), Mother counter-filed for a modification of parenting time in another attempt to take my children from my care, citing a long list of fabricated accusations of contempt. During the year intervening between the initial filings and our court date,

Mother quit most of her jobs, which reduced her income to a negligible amount. Finally, in 2015 we were able to go to court and the parenting time was upheld, but Mother's deliberate reduction in income was ignored and she was not held accountable for the fabricated accusations of contempt or acting on her threat of legal action. The result was a status quo.

Then in 2017, Mother again filed for a modification of parenting time. This time, Mother was able to convince the Judge to order a parenting time evaluation to be done through Multnomah County Family Services. This case was the single most egregious abuse of power and bias that I have witnessed in the many years I have been in the family court system. Our evaluator openly lied to me on multiple occasions and ultimately reduced me to an "every-other-weekend dad" for no reason beside her own personal preference towards parenting styles. What was most worrisome was Mother's insistence on forcing my children to choose between their parents which the custody evaluator even mentions in her report but does not in any way hold Mother accountable for doing.

Immediately after Mother had relegated me to this sub-parent role in my own children's lives, there was trouble. My younger son began self-harming again and my oldest son's anger issues resurfaced with a vengeance. Fortunately, my daughter has remained her sunny self. My children have been told repeatedly that I am an angry person for so long that this has placed a massive barrier in my relationship with my oldest son (not to mention her deliberate attempts to keep past issues alive). My younger son has taken to using the conflict in a way to attempt to manipulate both parents.

There will be another case soon. I have enough experience with the warning signs that I would not be surprised if I do not see an attempt to further reduce the parenting time within the next few months. Why should she not? She has tried time and again and has finally gotten momentum in her favor – and yes, my reduced time with my children will be held against me. The system enables her need to harm me.

A change in the law needs to be made. SB-318 is the first and most important step in dealing with the inequities being forced upon fathers across the state.

Men are treated as second-class citizens in the realm of family law and even the best of fathers are relegated to subordinate roles to mothers. Custody Evaluators, Parenting Time Coordinators and Judges are allowed to discriminate actively and willfully against men.

Furthermore, the *status quo* does not serve the interests of children. The vague language of the current law only serves to facilitate conflict. With so much room for interpretation, children suffer as one parent can continue to re-open the case year after year until they have achieved the complete ruination of the other. This begs the question: who does this benefit? Attorneys make more money when there is high conflict and fuzzy language. The “victorious” parent gets to savor the pain they have caused the other and get a larger child support check every month. Custody Evaluators and Parenting Time Coordinators get more cases and to satisfy their own agendas.

Both men and women can be abusers, drug addicts, alcoholics, or otherwise unfit parents – but few actually are. In family law, men are assumed to be just that and are discriminated against as a group.

By changing the presumption, we take away the power from bigots and vengeful ex-spouses.

Children need both their parents. They need them equally. Our society needs our children to benefit from healthy relationships from parents. SB-318 takes power away from vengeful mothers, attorneys, judges, “counselors” and para-court officials, such as custody evaluators, to punish good men and harm the next generation to act on their own greed, anger, and bias.

I do not need to go into detail the harm that is done to children when one parent is removed from their lives. Study after study has been done showing the damage unequal parenting time is doing to them.

I will show how this affects *my* children. They have been actively alienated from me and told that I am a horrible person – so they have lost a parent to talk to when life is difficult. I have wasted enough money in legal expenses that could have paid for at least one of their colleges, and I am sure a second with their mother’s expenses – so they have lost the financial security that I could have provided. The boys are angry and bitter, even to the point of self-harm as they try to deal with the effect of having to say bad things about me to win their mother’s approval – so they have lost the ability to love their parents equally. I am now the “weekend dad” – so they have lost their *Father* being able to be their father. While I can only hope this never comes to pass, someday my children will see all the hurt their mother has caused, they will see how she lied and manipulated them – so they will someday lose their Mother as well.

I have lots to offer my children. I have my own experiences to help them through life. I have my own lessons to teach. As such, I am an important part of their lives whether their mother and the courts agree or not. I fight daily to maintain my role as their parent. I refuse to be their friend and play at weekend dad, because that is not my job. I am their father.

Thank you very much for your time. If you have any questions or want to discuss my story in further detail, please feel free to reach out to me at elijahgodrick@gmail.com

--Elijah Goodrick