

My name is Sally Brown and I live in Multnomah County with my partner Michael Nichols.

I would like to lend my passionate support for this bill, 318.

I am here on behalf of my partner, who is working in Alaska for three weeks at a time, then home for three weeks a time, presently in Alaska, so could not be here. He took this hellish scheduled work when he discovered the mother of his child would be taking their then two year old daughter and moving to Hood River, Oregon, from the Bay Area, where we all resided at the time. He gave up a promising job as a project manager to do physical labor work on an island in Alaska, because it was the only way he could move to Oregon quickly, hoping to lose as little time with his precious daughter as possible. Prior to this move, he saw her nearly every single day. He commuted in rush hour traffic, a three hour round trip, to spend every evening possible with her. He was beginning to get overnights on the weekends as well. Since the mother moved, he has seen his daughter for one to two weekends each month. She has even begun limiting his phone calls. We are all horrified by her actions, and fearful of the traumatic affect it could have on his daughter. We are presently preparing for court, where we will spend thousands of dollars that could have otherwise been allocated to his daughter's future, all while remaining completely uncertain of what our future holds, by the will of a judge.

I would like to add that opponents of this bill have stated arguments such as a concern for a lack of creativity in devising parenting plans, should 50/50 be the established norm. That is ludicrous. This bill would give a starting point that assumes both parents are indeed parents. In our case, my partner attempted mediation with the mother several times. They agreed on many points, in fact, but as they began to wrap up the details, the mother touched base with her lawyer, who advised her to cease mediation immediately. She refused to allow the mediator to prepare any documentation regarding their meetings. We are left with no option but to pursue litigation, with no evidence of the agreements that were reached. Room for creativity will not always work out—had we begun with a rational and just starting point, wherein the mother would have nothing significant to gain financially, as I'm sure she was instructed by her lawyer, we might have settled this more readily. Presently, the custody battles are thought of just as such: war. But this is not war, this is a child's life and a child's precious relationship with her parents. In no way should she ever be regarded as a pawn. My partner would gladly get creative with their parenting plan, but that creativity should start from a base of equality. I have also heard the argument that in most parenting relationships, there is a “natural” primary caregiver, who performs most routine caring for the child. It is precisely this sort of misogynist, antiquated thinking that ruins lives every day in family court. The most healthy and functional parenting relationships that I have witnessed are those which share all parenting duties. It is absurd to assume that the tasks of raising a child should fall only on the shoulders of the mother or the father, and not both. As it goes, it takes a village.

This bill would provide the kind of love, time and attention that my partner's daughter deserves to receive from her father. As a daughter myself to an, at times, absent father, I know well how crucial this relationship is to the psyche of a growing girl. I am healed by watching this man who I love dedicate all of his energy and efforts to being a father to his daughter, who is now almost four years old. But so very fearful for her developing wounds, now, that her mother attempts to tarnish their relationship. Please move this bill forward, so that parents such as my partner can prevent that pain from ever happening, by being a constant, stable, loving connection to their children.

Thank you so much for your time.