

Testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee

In Support of SB 318

March 06, 2019

Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher and other members of the Committee:

My name is Jennifer Woodward, resident of Marion County. I am here to testify in support of Oregon senate bill 318. I am a daughter and mother of broken homes and divorce. Family doesn't have to end at divorce. Unfortunately, more times than not - it does. Our children and parents do not deserve to suffer at the hand of our own poor choices.

Mentioned at the hearing today against SB318 was that young children need the primary care of their mother during their formative years ruling out the fathers involvement as "necessary." I would like to mention, that it is no secret in our society in the United States most infants are placed in a care facility or care outside of the mothers primary care at or prior to 3 months of age so mother can return to work. Thus leaving the child **under the care of another human** outside of the parents as the primary care giver.

Under current legislation primary custody is usually granted to the mother. The non-custodial parent is required to fight for their right to be a equal parent and for equal parenting time. If SB318 passes the court will be required to deem parents unfit rather than having to deem a parent as fit. The argument that parents fleeing domestic violence will lose their rights or protection of their children is fallible and invalid. Any parent feeling domestic violence will be able to file an emergency order allowing the court to continue reviewing the custody on a case-by-case basis. The suggestion that equal parenting time would affect the protection of the child is outlandish. A child who is being subject to abuse every-other-weekend and one mid-week visit is no better off than a child being subject to abuse on any other visitation arrangement. A (PROVEN CASE) of an abusive parent should receive **no parenting time**.

- SB318 statute **will not** 'allow children to be subject to abuse' as the opinions of those who oppose the bill are arguing
- SB318 **will not** create more distain between parents (that does not already exist)
- SB318 **will not worsen a child's ACE score**
- SB318 **will** create a stipulation that both parents are created and responsible as equal parties
- SB318 **will** lessen the burden on the court system as they will be (mostly) seeing cases to deem parents unfit and not seeing thousands of cases of parents pleading that they are indeed fit

As everyone in this room and senate has heard today the many devastating results of the current legislation, I bring two success stories. These are personal accounts and experience where two separate families decided implement their own system against the court ruling.

In Jackson County, I was brought up in a home where my parents divorced when I was 11 years old. I am unsure what the parenting plan even read. *It was a high conflict divorce, so high, that my parents only communicated under emergency circumstances for the next twenty plus years.* Regardless of what the court order read **our parents chose to give their children a voice**. Although I believe my mother

held sole custody, at 13 I decided to move with my father 230 miles away and my mother was supportive (at that time she was in an abusive relationship.) My father continued to pay child support for the next 5 years for both of his children until my older brother turned 18. At which time he filed a request to terminate support.

My brother and half sister who were raised primarily by my mother in a fatherless home have grown to be burdens on our system. My sister is a methamphetamine addict under current incarceration. My brother faces homelessness and has never held a regular job.

With the grace of my father's parenting and regular and open access to my mother I grew to be a successful, strong contributor to our society and law abiding citizen.

As an adult at 31 years old with one 2 year old son and facing divorce, quickly, parenting time became a primary concern of mine. By maternal default I was our sons primary care giver. Upon the decision of separation, I informed my soon to be ex I would gladly and whole heartedly give him half of our parenting time. We self mediated and filed our divorce through the Marion County court system with no mediator and no attorneys. We agreed to equal parenting time and no child support being exchanged. We have a parenting plan in place which we agreed to only access if we reach a time where we cannot agree on our own - we have yet to fall back our parenting plan. While I understand it is not always possible to co-parent cohesively with the child(ren's) best interest in mind, sometimes the scars are too big, the wounds too deep and the pain is too fresh. Our children deserve better from their parents and from the court system. In the state of Oregon and across the world our children deserve equal parenting time and access to both parents if they are fit, willing and able.

Our children should not suffer the consequences of our broken relationships. The consequences should be held at the responsibility of the parents, not our innocent children. This should not be the courts burden - but unfortunately at times it will be. It is the courts responsibility to advocate for what is the best interest of each child and under most circumstances, this is equal-shared parenting time and access to both parents.

Although senate bill 318 will greatly affect the parenting time with our children's fathers it also protects the equal parenting time with their mothers.

I want to thank our Oregon senators for hearing the voices and cries for and from our children and plead that S318 is passed under the Oregon State Legislature Open Session 2019.

Jennifer Woodward
Marion County, Oregon

