

Oregon Senate Judiciary Committee

Testimony re: Senate Bill 318

Dear members of this committee,

Thank you for allowing us extra time to submit our testimonies to you!

I wrote a short testimony about my life as a child with divorced parents and now I would like to share with you my life as a mother, a wife and a member living in the society who is active with my children in many sports and school functions.

I married young I was 18, my husband was my best friend my entire life, divorce was absolutely not in my plans as I was from a 'broken home' and I most definitely did not want that for my innocent children. However, in 2012 approximately 5 months after my daughters birth it came the time that divorce was inevitable.

I hired an attorney spent nearly \$8,000 and my soon to be ex husband hired an attorney as well of which I'm sure his bill was nearly the same. I was advised by my attorney I was ENTITLED to half of HIS retirement, spousal support to the sum of \$1,200 monthly alimony and \$1,800 monthly in child support of which I declined and we agreed mutually on a set another of child support.. I could turn my children's father into a visitor, a visitor like they are to their grandparents, uncle, great grandparents. He is their dad, their other half but the 'normality' of divorce court is reduce dad to visitor..

We agreed on an amount of child support, we agreed to this visitation schedule that turns my children's daddy into a visitor. While I am their custodial parent.

Rewind my ex husband has a daughter he signed his parental rights Off to durning our marriage, so I was unsure if he was going to be willing to fulfill his daddy duties to my children is why I agreed to the 'normal' parenting plan.

Fast forward I told my ex husband in front of the judge and both of our attorneys that I don't want his money, nor do I want child support what I want is I want our children to have his time. I want them to spend an equal amount of time with him and his extended family. I told him durning this time that our divorce decree means very little to me, that the door of my home is open he can have access to our children whenever, and for however long. He left the court room and took a job out of state for the next year seeing our children a handful of times.

Since 2012 my ex husband has been hit or miss with even minimal parenting time. I put fourth the effort to contact him every Sunday, Wednesday and every other weekend to see if he would like to have our children, unfortunately more times than not he can't have them for one reason or another and it is mostly because of work..

I hold no resentment for my ex husband and I will never keep the kids from him in any way. But this is our life, this is the life of my children. We manage and we overcome but the times he has missed, the sporting events he doesn't show up to, are all things my children will remember. The phone calls they make to him that go to voicemail and are never returned are what they will remember most also.

I spoke with my ex husband over the weekend and asked him if he would please make more of an effort to be more involved with our children, because our almost 12yr old boy needs him. He wants his dad at his wrestling practice, at his tournaments, he wants him to show up at the school to have lunch with him when he can, my daughter who is seven also wants her daddy to come to all her sporting events and school functions. His response to me was 'I'm trying to raise my step daughter and my daughter Ash, I just can't make it to their stuff' we discussed child support and I expressed to him again please take them do things with them equally and help pay for the extracurricular activities they want to do and I'll gladly get rid of the entire child support order, again, he responded with 'I can't fulfill that Ash, it is easier for me to pay child support'. I have had the conversation with some about this situation and they have urged me to drop child support anyway, my thought to this is if he is not willing to give our children his time now, at least when they are adults they will have a small little nest egg to go fourth in life and do whatever it is they wish today, put a down payment on a home, but a car, travel a little, invest it, or pay for school if they are unable to get a scholarship, although this might sound selfish it is how my children's situation currently is unfortunately.

How is this situation beneficial to my children, it is not my children are 4x's more likely to have emotional and behavioral problems, 7x more likely to become a teen parent, along with being more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol, and sadly they are 2x's more likely to drop out of high school. My children are now in this statist because of things out of my control.

My children would benefit leaps and bounds if they could have an equal amount of time with their dad. I however can not force him to do so.

In my life outside of mom, I work and have worked in the construction industry which is mostly male dominated. The stories I have heard from so many dads fighting for any amount of time with their children is sickening, not just for them but because of the pure torment it has to bring the children. I did some research to try to gather in my mind how frequently this takes place and I found that the census bureau released the following national statistics, there is an estimated 73.7 million children under the age of 18 living in the United States in 2016 of these children 69% of them live in two parent households, 23% live with a single mother. From 1960-2016 the percentage of children living in a two parent household decreased from 88- 69%. Of those children there were 50.7 million living with two parent families, 47.7 million live with two married parents, and 3.0 million live with two unmarried parents. In this same time frame the number of children living with only their mother almost tripled from 8% to 23%, kids only living with their dad only increased from 1% - 4%. There is about 62% of mothers that work outside the home while only 66% of dads work out the home. To me this reads more moms have kids, although the number of dads is slowly increasing the rate is not even comparable, it also tells me that 62% of moms are working so although I am not an expert to me it means moms are no longer just the primary caregiver like many argue, they are in fact in the working world also. So the argument of mom bringing the emotional and social support person for children due to there vast availability seems to be turning the corner, as they are only a small percentage behind the amount of dads in the work force.

I would like to break down a little more the static for the lack of access children have to both parents equally leads to 63% of youth suicides, 71% of high school drop outs, 75% of adolescents in substance abuse rehab, 85% of youth in prison and 85% of all children with behavioral problems. This speaks volumes to me as a mother and a member of this society watching my fellow peers and children whom I have the pleasure of interacting with in my children's sports or in their school. I see so many children suffering around me and upon learning their story the results come in that they are from a one parent home. In this study that I reviewed it stated that when they asked adult children of divorce how they feel about shared parenting their response was only 7% felt their mothers wanted them to have equal time with each parent, but 85% of these children wanted more time with their fathers. 70% of all these children believed equal parenting time was best, and 70% knew their fathers wanted more time with them but their mothers would not allow it. 93% of these children that were able to have equal parenting time with both parents believed that it was the best thing that happened to them.

Something else I would like to bring to attention is on the Oregon Child support website it clearly states that they serve 400,000 people by providing financial support, they process \$1 million each day in cash and medical support. With that the Oregon Department of Child Support employs 572 staff members, 125 DA staff, and another 22 system project staff members. Based on the report on Glassdoor.com the pay range for a child support case manager is \$2,700-\$3,500 monthly. If we average the income at \$3,000 monthly then the state of Oregon is paying \$2,157,000 in wages. If equal parenting time was awarded in even half of the cases than Oregon would ultimately be saving thousands and thousands of dollars, which would allow us to put this money to work in more practical places. Also in Oregon we have a little over 4million residents, 50% are female, 21% are under 18, and 5% are under 5 yrs of age. The amount of women working in the state of Oregon age 16 and older is 57.6% leaving 43% of men are working in Oregon. Meaning woman are becoming more predominant in the workforce and allowing more and more fathers to be the primary caretaker for the children, not just nationally but also in our own state.

I heard and read yesterday that domestic violence is a concern when this bill or one like it is adapted to our state however Oregon had 139,580 calls for help in 2017 and in 2016 which included Domestic Violence, Sexual assault, stalking and other issues, although this number is high and has had gradual increase since 2014, lets not take away the fact that the number of men and those that identify as transgender who have reported Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, or stocking is also increasing rapidly as well. From 2014-2017 the percentage of Sexual Assaults involving men went from 4% - 6.9% those that are transgender has a rise from .14%-1.6%. Domestic violence seen a rise in male victims as well from 8.7% in 2014 to 9.6% in 2017. Transgender domestic violence also increased from .09%- .1%. When it came to stocking that was reported male increased, males went from 17.8% in 2014 to 24.9% in 2017. Transgender did not increase in this area. Although the number of domestic violence is a true issue and a concern during testimony yesterday I heard from the opposition that there is fear that this bill will increase the access to children by violent parents. With this statement there seems to be a presumption that the violent or abusive parent is either the noncustodial parent or the father. We also heard yesterday from a number of fathers who have been victims of abuse. So I strongly disagree that this bill will increase the time abusive parents get with their children because this is already happening. Also, this bill starts with the presumption of 50/50, but can be adjusted based on proven abuse. So let's not shy away from SB 318 just because we're afraid of what change means- what if change is a great thing for Oregon kids.

In conclusion, I feel this bill will bring forth more and more dads that want what my children's father takes for granted, I feel that given the opportunity to allow equal and shared parenting time with children we will see a decrease in many issues pertaining to our youth, I also believe that the case with my children is not as common as some may want to argue. I believe there is two sides to every story, and than there is the story without two emotionally attached people. Divorce is hard I lived it as a child and I now live it as a mom, I made the choice to become unattached emotionally to my situation because at the end of the day, we as adults grew apart, we couldn't find common ground to live and reconcile our differences, but my children were no part of that. I believe that bringing fourth equal parenting straight away it will reduce the need for court cost, and if an agreement can't be made perhaps both parents need to seek co-parenting counseling instead of dragging our innocent children through events they should never have to go through. This bill won't help my children but it will help thousands or others. I am a mom, a step mom, I believe that SB 318 will bring a great positive change for Oregon's youth.

Thank you again for allowing us more time to submit testimony! I look forward to seeing this bill becoming part of the future.

Ashlee

The statistics I have provided came from the census bureau, [timetoputkidsfirst.org](http://timetoputkidsfirst.org), and Oregon Departments of child support and DHS.