



House of Representatives

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Harrisburg

Testimony of

CONSTITUENTS IN SUPPORT OF HB1499

Before

PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
REPUBLICAN POLICY COMMITTEE

On

Tuesday, November 18, 2025

Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

Disclaimer:

The following testimonies have been submitted to Representative Flick's office via email as constituents from his district, from around the Commonwealth, and well beyond state lines have learned about HB1499. These are the experiences of those who have reached out to share their stories and support of child custody reform. Our office chose to share the email testimonies as they came to our office, without altering or editing the copy. We have redacted first names and addresses for the sake of privacy.

Teresa Sneed

Founder & CEO, National Family Justice

Florida

Testimony in Support of Pennsylvania House Bill 1499: Establishing a Presumption of Shared Parenting

Chairman, distinguished members of the committee, and Representative Flick, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Teresa Sneed, and I am the Founder and CEO of National Family Justice, a nonprofit organization founded in 2021 and dedicated to reforming family law systems nationwide to prioritize children's safety, wellbeing, and fundamental right to meaningful relationships with both fit parents. At NFJ, we empower families navigating the often opaque and adversarial world of family courts by providing education, advocacy, professional training, and direct resources such as document reviews for ethical violations, strategic guidance for pro se litigants, amicus briefs in landmark cases, and parent-to-parent mentorship programs. Whether you're a military family safeguarding deployment rights, a parent combating coercive control, or someone rebuilding after parental alienation, NFJ stands as a steadfast ally, offering tools and support to turn systemic failures into pathways for healing and justice. Our vision is simple yet transformative: a family court system that serves families, not silos, and puts children's lifelong health first.

I am here today to strongly support Representative Flick's House Bill 1499, which would establish a rebuttable presumption of shared parenting in Pennsylvania custody determinations. This legislation is not about parents' rights, it is about children's rights. And the science is unequivocal: shared parenting is what children need and deserve. By starting from a place of equality for loving, fit parents, HB 1499 doesn't just reform custody; it prevents the downstream tragedies that ripple through our communities, from foster care overload to fractured futures.

The Current Crisis in Pennsylvania: A Scale That Demands Action

Pennsylvania's family courts are in crisis, not because of malice, but because of outdated policies that leave children adrift in a sea of uncertainty. According to the National Parents Organization's 2025 Shared Parenting Report Card, Pennsylvania earns a dismal D grade, ranking in the bottom third of states nationwide. Pennsylvania lacks a statutory presumption for shared parenting, no policy language encouraging equal time, and insufficient safeguards against false allegations that weaponize children. This isn't abstract policy failure; it's a human emergency affecting tens of thousands of Keystone families every year.

Consider the numbers: In 2024, Pennsylvania saw approximately 18,000 divorces and legal separations, impacting over 30,000 children under 18. Yet, under our current "best interests" standard, untethered to evidence-based defaults, more than 80% of these children end up in sole maternal custody arrangements, seeing their fathers just one day a week and every other weekend. This isn't equity; it's erasure. The fallout? Our foster care system, already strained with 15,000 children in out-of-home placements annually (a rate of 4.5 entries per 1,000 kids, far

above the national average), sees 20% of entries tied to family disruption from custody battles rather than abuse alone. And the mental health toll? Divorced or separated Pennsylvanians face a 2.4 times higher suicide risk than married individuals, contributing to roughly 20% of our state's 3,000+ annual suicides, many linked to the isolation of unequal parenting. For children, the scars run deeper: adult children of divorce are 14% more likely to attempt suicide, perpetuating cycles of pain.

These aren't isolated tragedies, they're systemic symptoms of a model that defaults to division, not unity. And lurking beneath is Title IV-D, the federal child support enforcement program, whose well-intentioned incentives have morphed into unintended hammers. In Pennsylvania, with over \$3 billion in arrears statewide, IV-D's retention of payments (up to 55% kept by the state for welfare reimbursement) disproportionately jails low-income Black and Hispanic parents, five times more often than white parents, for non-payment they can't afford. This isn't justice; it's a poverty trap that severs father-child bonds, driving up foster entries by 15-20% in affected families and fueling racial disparities where Black children are twice as likely to enter care. Sole custody amplifies this: when dads are sidelined to "visitors," compliance plummets, arrears balloon, and kids lose the stability that voluntary support provides. HB 1499 flanks this flaw by promoting shared time, which boosts compliance by up to 76%, turning a punitive cycle into a partnership that keeps families whole.

The Scientific Evidence is Overwhelming: Shared Parenting Saves Lives

Over the past four decades, more than 60 peer-reviewed studies have consistently demonstrated that children in shared parenting arrangements experience significantly better outcomes than those in sole custody across virtually every measure of wellbeing. Dr. Robert Bauserman's landmark 2002 meta-analysis, published in the *Journal of Family Psychology*, examined 33 studies involving more than 2,650 children. His findings were definitive: children in joint physical custody were better adjusted than those in sole custody on all measures, including general adjustment, family relationships, self-esteem, emotional and behavioral adjustment, and divorce-specific adjustment. Remarkably, children in shared parenting families showed outcomes statistically indistinguishable from children in intact families.

Professor Linda Nielsen of Wake Forest University reviewed 60 studies comparing children's outcomes in shared versus sole physical custody families. The results were striking: In 34 studies, shared parenting children had better outcomes on all measures; in 14 studies, equal on some and better on others; in 6 studies, equal across the board; and in *zero* studies did they fare worse. These benefits hold even controlling for income and conflict, logic dictates that when kids get double the love and stability, their resilience soars.

Dr. William Fabricius of Arizona State University, whose research spurred Arizona's 2013 reforms, uncovered a dose-response miracle: child outcomes improve progressively as parenting time nears equality, peaking at 35%+ with each parent. A 2023 *PLOS ONE* systematic review of rigorous global studies echoed this: in 75% of cases, shared custody kids match intact-family wellbeing, while sole custody consistently lags.

Specific Outcome Benefits: From Cradle to Career

The research isn't theoretical, it's transformative. Mental health: Shared parenting kids show 30-50% lower rates of depression, anxiety, and PTSD, with self-esteem scores rivaling intact families. Academically: They boast higher GPAs (up 0.5 points on average) and graduation rates 20% above sole-custody peers, per Norwegian and U.S. longitudinal data. Behaviorally: Risky behaviors plummet, smoking down 40%, drug use 25% less likely, while delinquency drops 35%. Physically: Fewer stress illnesses, better sleep, and stronger immune responses, as dual homes buffer cortisol spikes. Relationally: Bonds with both parents *and* extended family endure, slashing alienation risks that affect 11-15% of divorce cases (over 2,000 PA kids yearly).

Imagine: For every child thriving under shared parenting, we avert a lifetime of interventions, saving Pennsylvania \$500 million annually in mental health, welfare, and justice costs.

Addressing Common Concerns: Safeguards Without Sacrifice

We hear the fears: "Shared parenting escalates conflict." Yet evidence flips the script, shared arrangements report 20-30% *lower* ongoing conflict, as equality defuses the "winner-take-all" bomb. Sole custody? It incentivizes alienation, turning courts into battlegrounds.

"High-conflict cases?" Even there, shared time yields equal or superior outcomes, the child's bond with each parent trumps parental spats, providing twice the emotional anchor.

And domestic violence? HB 1499's rebuttable presumption includes ironclad exceptions for proven abuse, neglect, or endangerment, requiring clear and convincing evidence, just as in current law. Crucially, this protects the small minority (only 10-15% of custody cases involve substantiated severe DV, per national data) without punishing the 85-90% of low-conflict families who deserve equality. Why deny 30,000+ PA kids their dual-parent lifeline to shield a fraction? Post-reform states like West Virginia saw maltreatment drop 20%, shared parenting *deters* harm by fostering accountability, not isolation. Logic prevails: Protect the vulnerable fiercely, but don't orphan the innocent majority.

Real-World Success: The Kentucky Model Lights the Way

Kentucky's 2018 presumption slashed divorces 25% (vs. 18% nationally), earned 83% public acclaim, and cut court filings, saving taxpayers millions. Arkansas, West Virginia, Florida, and Missouri followed; 20 states eye reforms. Pennsylvania: Join the vanguard, not the laggards.

Additional Critical Benefits: Breaking Cycles of Harm

HB 1499 dismantles Title IV-D's shadows. Sole custody funnels dads into arrears traps, PA's \$3B backlog jails 5,000+ parents yearly, disproportionately Black (60% of poor nonpayers are minorities), severing bonds and spiking foster entries 15%. Shared parenting? Compliance surges 76%, as engaged fathers provide willingly, halting the poverty-incarceration loop that scars kids with absent dads and overtaxed moms. It curbs alienation (13.4% prevalence nationally, ~2,500 PA cases), boosts moms' earnings 325% via equal schedules, and honors fathers' vital role, reducing kids' suicide risk 14% and delinquency 35%.

Pennsylvania Children Deserve Better: Equity for the Many, Justice for All

The current patchwork condemns most kids to lopsided lives, all to "protect" a minority, logical folly when safeguards abound. For 85% of PA families (low-conflict, per studies), HB 1499 delivers the science-backed default: 35%+ time with each fit parent. No more coin-toss courts; just compassionate continuity.

Dr. Fabricius calls this a "public health imperative", father absence hikes kids' mortality 2x, psychiatric risks 4x. We can end that.

Conclusion: A Legacy of Love and Leadership

Pennsylvania stands at a crossroads: Cling to a D-grade status quo that divides families and drains dreams, or champion HB 1499 - the child-first revolution sweeping the nation. With 54+ studies unanimous on shared parenting's gifts, and zero showing net harm, the math is mercy. This isn't legislation; it's liberation for 30,000 kids yearly, for stronger communities, for a Commonwealth where every child wakes to two homes of hope.

Representative Flick, your bipartisan beacon inspires us all. Advance HB 1499; let Pennsylvania lead. Together, we rewrite endings into beginnings.

Thank you. I welcome your questions.

Tony Payton, Jr.

Former State Rep., 179th Legislative District

Pennsylvania

Good morning, Chairman and members of the Committee.

My name is Tony Payton Jr., and I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of Representative Flick's 50/50 shared custody bill.

I'm here today not as a Former Member or lobbyist, but as a father who has been through the custody system and experienced both its strengths and its shortcomings firsthand. When my son was very young, I was granted about 40% custody — which, at the time, felt like a blessing. It meant I could be a real, everyday presence in his life. I was there for the small moments that matter: getting him ready in the morning, bedtime stories, meals together, and all the little things that make up being a parent.

But as he got older and started school, that time was reduced to weekends and summers. It was tough to go from being an active, hands-on dad to just a weekend parent. I could see how it affected our connection, and I knew that wasn't what was best for him.

I also learned the hard way how easily the system can be used against one parent, often the father. Back in 2016, when my son was only four years old, his mother made several allegations of abuse against me. Every single one of them was investigated and found to be unfounded. One accusation in particular stood out — she claimed that my nephew had beaten my son. The only problem was, my nephew wasn't even in the state at the time the incident supposedly happened. Despite that, I still had to go through the stress, the investigations, and the emotional toll that came with defending myself against something that simply wasn't true.

That experience shook me. Not just because of the false claim itself, but because I saw how easily a parent can weaponize the system to disrupt custodial time and damage the other parent's relationship with their child — even when the allegations don't hold up.

Now, I want to be very clear — protecting children from abuse is absolutely essential. Any real allegation must be taken seriously. But the system also needs to recognize when claims are being made in bad faith, and there should be safeguards to prevent false or manipulative accusations from being used to gain leverage in custody disputes.

That's why this bill matters. Representative Flick's proposal starts from a fair and child-centered place — a presumption of 50/50 custody. It doesn't take away judicial discretion, and it doesn't ignore safety concerns. What it does is ensure that both parents begin on equal footing, because research — and common sense — tell us that kids do best when both parents are equally involved.

This bill would help reduce unnecessary conflict, promote cooperation, and remind both parents that they each play a vital role in their child's growth and stability.

I truly believe that if something like this had been in place when my son was younger, our lives would have looked a lot different. He would have had more consistent access to both of his parents, and we might have avoided years of tension and court battles that didn't help anyone — especially not him.

So I strongly support this legislation, and I thank Representative Flick for having the courage to bring it forward. It's time our custody laws reflect what every parent knows in their heart — that both moms and dads matter, and our children need us both.

Thank you for your time, and I'd be happy to answer any questions.

J. Brownsberger

Jonestown, PA

Hi, I heard about your custody reform. My thoughts and feelings on the subject, where I demand fairness in the best interest of the child is the simple fact of the matter, of being a fit parent. I fully support the mothers role in my childs life. However I strongly detest that even of the most honorable and considered fairest judges are still leaning on antiquated legislation from the 80s that fits the narrow vision that only a woman is fit to raise children based solely on the fact they're born with a uterus. Abuse is abuse, it doesn't matter what gender you were born! My son is facing depression and his behavioral health is declining because of the system is against him. He's currently sitting in phil haven because I told the judge and my attorney that the mother is not fit. What does the judge do, use the antiquated legislation currently on the books and forced this child into narcissistic abusive relationship with his mother. I can not act in my role to protect this child without children and youth up my ass because they think I'm alienating the mother from the child. When in fact, I'm not influencing the child in any capacity! He sincerely wants nothing to do with his mother. Why does anyone have to go through the expensive process of litigation to prove that? I personally feel that once a record has been established with crisis intervention and or children and youth. That should trigger a red flag in the court system. And of course I would fully expect nuances because you can't have people just coming up with of off excuses that parent didn't do this or that, ect. It has to be an established pattern, then it goes to next step intervention before final step, removal of parent. Unless of course it's actual abuse. I won't spell that out, that's clear and obvious reason for removal. At the end of the day I'm just disgruntled because now my son is stuck up in phil haven because of trauma from mom. Now I have to be stuck cleaning up this bs all while I have to live with this narcissistic court order. It hurts even worse because reflecting back, if I could tell the judge straight to their face, I'd say, "this is the part where I get to tell you I told you this would happen! Do you remember all the grievances I gave you and you chose to ignore me?" And even despite fighting for sole custody and removal of mom, I still want her in the childs life. But mom has to chose that. Mom has to make those appropriate choices to make things better. I'm not advocating slamming doors. I'm simply advocating for protection from abuse. Pennsylvania at its current status seems like the only way to get that is if the parent is a life threatening scenario to the child. Narcissistic and mental abuse doesn't count, only physical abuse. I've shared these thoughts with Russ Diamond before, he knows. I wanted to share them with you since you're the one introducing the legislation.

A. Glenn

Jersey Shore, PA

Jamie, I am in the middle of a very nasty divorce and custody battle and I am getting no help anywhere I turn. My aunt recommended that I reach out to you as you are an advocate for change in the child custody system. My soon to be ex husband is truly trying to destroy my life, take my son, and ruin my reputation and is using the pa judicial system and county social services to do so by telling lies, filing false reports. I would love to meet with you and share my story of the pure hell I have gone through over the last year. Thank you for your time and consideration and I hope to hear from you soon.

D. Conrad

S. Williamsport, PA

I would like to thank you for addressing the unfair way the courts award custody for minor children. Everyone talks about how fathers need to be involved in their children's lives, and if they eventually have to give up fighting the system, due too lack of money, time involved going to hearings that usually get the same results, they are then called a dead beat dad. In my family's experience the court has done everything to make having equal time with our grandchildren impossible. Let's face it, it's usually the father that doesn't come out with the results that's best for the children, or the father's family(grandparents). The action of a judge deciding what is best and almost always siding with the mother is terribly wrong in this day and age. The system is broken and until both parents are valued equally, it is not only the father's family that is hurt, it is the children. Again thank you for seeing this issue for what it is EXTREMELY wrong. Please don't stop fighting, it is long over due that this wrong is made right.

T. Wolfe

Manheim, PA

Kudos for your work on custody issues. Divorced father here. Managed to keep custody out of the courts, but still had the pain of not seeing my kids every day. I'll never forget the state website for custody and support issues. Every single point was for mothers. Web search recommended for fathers. This was 2001. God bless

B. Baysore

S. Williamsport, PA

Jamie please continue fighting for your child custody bill. This is far past due and needs passed to give all fathers an equal playing field to parenting. I can personally attest to the nightmares of child custody and being unfairly punished simply because I worked and the mother of my son did not. It took nearly 10 years of legal battles and tens of thousands of dollars to get the court to see that not only could I faithfully carry out my responsibilities as a father, he should be with my full time due to his on going struggles in school. Once I was given the chance, my son flourished in school quickly going from a failing student to a student who consistently made honor roll and was drafted into the jr national honor society when he made it to highschool. Thank you for promoting common sense legislation and I implore you not to give up on getting this bill pas

R. Casselberry

Pittsburgh, PA

Hello Rep. Flick. I just read your press release about your bill supporting 50/50 custody for parents. I am a victim of the family court as a child. My dad was granted almost no custody due to baseless claims from my mother and has all but disappeared from my life ever since. I have now gone through the court system as a father and spent about \$100,000 to thankfully get 50/50 custody of my own daughter. Her mother hid her birth from me and fought for no custody for me every step of the way. It took years, a mountain of cash, and uprooting my entire life to please the judges whims, but i was one of the lucky dads that the state allows to be in their childs life. I live in fear every day thay the family court system will turn around and take my 3 year old girl from me when her mother inevitably files again. I have searched for a group actively advocating for this cause but have mostly found men whining about how unfair the system is. You are taking action. How can i help?

N. Kasikova

Mechanicsburg, PA

I've been fighting Pennsylvania's antiquated custody laws forever. It's completely unacceptable they've been nearly u changed since inception since 1983. Two things I'm passionate about having changed is the simple fact that a man should not go without all because the woman is awarded child support! Too many men have to suffer homeless or jail time because they can't afford child support. Personally I grew up around woman where that's how they make a living. Spread their legs and have all the children they want. Separate from the man and collect free

paychecks! The second this I find highly disturbing about that process is once the child's born a man has no say in the matter and is fucked for life because of the narcissistic abuse he received from the woman! My situation in particular, my ex she forced a child on me. Said it was physically impossible to bear children and now I'm stuck with something I didn't ask for! She is legally mentally ill so I'm not about ready to just hand the child over to an unfit individual but now I'm stuck with no way out. I can't legally forfeit custody unless someone else takes my place. All I ask is that legislation be drawn up to make it more fair and equal for the man. This sexist bs that the woman always win is for the birds and it's honestly unconstitutional! I ask that something also be put on the books for an easier way out, and only under the circumstances that proven in front of a judge that the woman's only role in having the child was to narcissistically abuse and or financially abusive towards the man. There needs to be more protections and safe guards protecting the innocent men who are abused, like myself against woman who sole interests lie in hurting someone else. Legally, if I wanted out today. My only option is suicide. I don't want to die but this is also bs and finding someone to put laws in place that protect men from this abuse is proving difficult.

C. Strouse

Williamsport, PA

My son has a 9 year old son where he had shared weekly custody rights. The judge decided mother deserved full time custody thereby giving my son every other weekend and Wednesday from 2-6:30. My son is an upstanding citizen, valued employee and loving father to his only son. He has been treated like a criminal by so many affiliated in the justice system as the father which includes denying him the right to share in his care by sharing weekly living arrangements. These judges decisions to deny fathers equal custody living arrangements also denies son's parents to also lose rights just as their son.

C. Newswanger

Ephrata, PA

Dear Representative Flick, I hope that this email finds you well. I am writing because i just read an article about HB 378. While we are on opposite sides of the political spectrum, i felt the need to reach out and thank you for fighting this fight for all Pennsylvanian parents who have suffered due to the unfair, and often cruel whims of the family court system in Pennsylvania. I am a 45 year old divorced father of three incredible children, now 20, 18, and 14. Over the past 7 years, I have dealt with the court assigning my ex wife as the custodial parent, despite the fact that she works 3rd shift and i spend far more time with my children than she does due to her schedule. Over these years i have paid over a hundred thousand dollars in child support, while also paying

a bulk of my children's day to day expenses. I have been unable to claim them on my taxes. I have been made to feel like the lesser parent simply because i am the father. The archaic custody laws of our great state have hurt so many for so long, and i could not be more grateful that you and your colleagues are taking the steps to begin correcting this. While i am nearly at the end of this hell, two adult children and one not far off, i hope that your fight will lead to less parents going through the things i have for so long. Thank you, for considering what is in the best interests of your constituents, your state, and most of all, our children who are the future of Pennsylvania and America. Sincerely, Christopher Newswanger

N. Hill

Beaver Falls, PA

Dear Mr. Flick, I want to start by saying thank you—truly, from the bottom of my heart. Seeing someone stand up for fathers' rights the way you have means more than I can put into words. You've become a champion for fathers like me, and I'm incredibly grateful for that. The system is deeply flawed. Despite being an active, loving, and present father, I barely get to see my children now. It's heartbreaking. The saddest part of my life is knowing that I'm missing out on precious time with my kids while they're still young—time I can never get back. They've become visitors in my life, and it's devastating. This needs to change. The system must be held accountable for this injustice. 50-50 custody should be the starting point—especially when a father has been consistently present, has no history of abuse, is financially stable, and can provide everything a child needs. It's not just about fairness—it's about giving our children the chance to grow up with both parents equally involved in their lives. Please keep fighting this fight. Your courage and dedication give fathers like me hope. I would love to get more involved and share my story if there's ever an opportunity. Thank you for standing up for what is right. You've given so many of us a voice, and for that, I will always be thankful.

A. Miller

Duncannon, PA

Ref. HB 378 Please hear me out as I am not in your legislative district. This is for you to hear. I fully support the bill you sponsored that unfortunately failed to pass by a few votes. Please reintroduce the bill each year, get a few more legislators to help sponsor it and "tweak" to get it approved. I am very interested because I suffered "bad" court decisions 40 years ago and the damaging results continue today. Had there been 50/50 custody, the result would be entirely different. It is no excuse for the lawyers and court that 40 years ago they actually knew little to nothing about parental alienation. They went by the cookbook and lies. The court decisions in my family made the situation worse to this day. After the custody decision, one daughter was

choked by her father. She returned to me and her father ignored her for many years. Charges were not filed because she had recently turned 18 and would have had to file and testify against her father. Probably wrongly, I decided she should not go through the trauma of taking her father to court. My younger daughter witnessed the brute control. She was scared, protected herself by staying with a controlling father. It was a psychological home run for him. My background is as a secondary school teacher and an environmental chemist state employee. I am not, nor have ever been, anything but a decent person. With lies to the court and to the children in their formative years, my ex spouse managed to flip events and make himself appear to be the best parent and provider for the girls. At the time, I was working part-time for the post office. To this day I find it unbelievable this could happen when I did nothing, nothing to make the court think I was the less capable parent. His known affair had no effect. I share my custody experience with you and the unfairness of the Pennsylvania system. I disagree that men are unfairly targeted. You said, custody was given to mothers 80% of the time. I doubt this % is true today but that is not my point. Today both parents and children suffer consequences of bad court decisions. My case was unbelievably unfair and without explanation. I ended up with the "short end of the stick". Better said, my daughters and I pay the price to this day. Through court hearings, many lies not easily traced were told to cover up an extramarital affair. I did nothing to break up a marriage. The children were alienated from me with lies, and overwhelming attention that was not given before the affair coverup. The court listened to lies and to the children who were already alienated. The court, giving more time, influence and control to one parent severely limits the influence of the other parent. This has a negative effect on the children. The format followed by the courts is antiquated and seriously needs changed because people suffer lifelong consequences of the court's unfair decisions. The decisions are mostly made by people with inadequate background, training or life experiences. The children experience life long effects from the decisions and they are the most important persons to consider. As you proposed in the bill , the way to correct the influence discrepancies is to have 50/50 shared custody. One additional thing I would add to your reasons for not sharing custody is parental alienation. A parent should not qualify for 50 % custody when they use psychological manipulation, a form of abuse, to win custody. You are correct in that the custody should be shared 50/50 with responsible parents to avoid the unfairness. If you need any assistance I am willing to help get this bill passed. Thanks for addressing the problem. A. Miller Telephone number is a house phone and does not receive texts. PS. Let your votes do what is right for the country and let them be fair and honest.

A. Rich

Audubon, NJ

Good Morning Sir, I had a friend named S. McLaughlin call me and share what you are attempting to do for fellow fathers. I can't begin to tell you how grateful I am for you and the hope they give me as a single father dealing with similar circumstances. My name is Andrew

Rich I currently reside in NJ about 10mins east of Philadelphia PA. I am currently staring another petition to modify custody from my ex wife and her new husband. While we were married we lived in a town, Narberth PA it's just west of Philadelphia PA. We started out with 50/50 custody but over the past 6 years I lost 50/50 and now she's asking for me to go from every Thursday and every other weekend to just every other Saturday and Sunday. With an occasional school holiday here and there and week on week off in the summer. All over a 40 minute car ride due to driving directly through the city. And a judge who feels that anything over a 10min commute is just "too much on them" and we have never made it to a court hearing. I'm sure you get hundreds of these emails every day. I just want to share a little bit of my situation and thank you for what you are trying to accomplish it matters every day it gives me hope to keep going!

J. Schoch

Monroe, PA

BEST BILL EVER! Needed in all 50 states! Long overdue! J.Schoch (#9 in Raised by these Wolves books, Amazon) & Maryann Petri (Slam the Gavel) here! We Support you! Much reform, judicial accountability is needed as lawyers, AFCs, judges, etc continue to violate laws, amendments as Rico. Clearly not in the best interest of a child. Godspeed to you!

C. Yuhasz

Aliquippa, PA

Dear Representative Flick, I recently learned of your efforts to secure 50/50 parenting rights for all fit parents in Pennsylvania, and I want to personally thank you for championing this critical cause. My husband has spent the last four years fighting to preserve his fundamental right to play a daily role in his son's life—a battle that has cost us tens of thousands of dollars and countless hours in court, all to prove something that should be self-evident: that a loving, fit parent matters. Despite well-documented evidence of misconduct and ongoing investigations into his son's mother's actions regarding his therapy, we continue to face immense legal and emotional hurdles. Now, she has informed us of her intention to move him out of state, further threatening his ability to maintain a meaningful relationship with his son. We will not stop fighting, but the toll on our family has been immeasurable. I wholeheartedly support your work to protect parental rights and prevent others from enduring the same unnecessary struggles. If there is any way I can contribute—whether through advocacy, outreach, testimony, or any other means—please know that I am ready and willing to help. Your efforts are invaluable, and I would be honored to assist in any way possible. Thank you for your dedication to this cause. I look forward to hearing how I can support your efforts. Sincerely, Carrie Yuhasz

A. Pulkrabek

Phoenix, AZ

Hi Jamie, I wish to thank you for starting a long overdue father's rights advocacy in Pennsylvania. I only wish that Arizona had representation and elected officials with courage like you. I respect all that you've been trying to do. I too am a father that had my 50/50 custody diminished to every other weekend by an evil ex wife, and a misandrist judge in November of 2021. I, like you, am a loving father of two sons 12, and 14. I go to, and participate in their school, sports, camping, take them skiing, and provide growth instilling maturity. However, I have spent an exorbitant amount of time and money battling a stacked deck against father's rights in the Arizona courts, just trying to get my kids back to 50/50. Even though I am a doctor of dental surgery, upstanding member of the community, I have been struggling in the family courts to see my kids more than every other weekend. I have lost many court battles, including a losing a 2022 attempt with the court of appeals. Also I lost a recent petition in July 2024, in an attempt to recover custody time. Now I've suffered another loss at the 2025 appeal because my attorney's staff, forgot to send in the transcript in to the court of appeals. And another loss today (4-1-25) at reconsideration where the appeals judges refused to allow the transcript later. I would like to hear from you and speak to you regarding how you were finally successful in your battle for your kids.

A. Berger

Centerville, PA

I know I am not in your district, however I wanted to applaud you on your motion for an amendment to House Bill 378. I never realized how broken the family court system truly was until I had to watch my husband battle time and time again. We have tried to get a custody modification. My step daughter struggles in school and her mother is extremely high conflict and is mental abusive. October 4, 2024 we went in front of a judge in Erie county PA. The judge talked to my 10 year old step daughter and made a ruling based off of that and that alone. During his ruling he stated "Mr. Berger, I have daughters of my own and around 9,10,11, and 12 all little girls hate their fathers", "All little girls need their mother". Now mind you we were never trying to take custody away from the mother we were just trying to do a flip flop so we had her during the week for school and mom had her on the weekends. (We currently have 3 weekends a month, while mom gets to pick which ever weekend she wants). My step daughter struggles to behave in her current school and in her mother's care. The judge does not know any of this as he never heard any testimony or saw any evidence. They say PA uses 16 factors to determine the best interest of the child. We had those in every way shape or form, however the judge never gave us an opportunity to show that. The worse part of all of this is the very next day the child admitted that she told the judge what mom told her to say. As soon as we left the court house the mother

went and petitioned for the courts for an increase of child support based off of before care expenses. (My husband already pays around half his check every 2 weeks for child support.) The child has been in before care for 5 years and this is the last year she is able to do it. Never once has this been brought up in the past. We also found out that before care is paid for by CCIS funding. The mediator soaked up every word mom said, including trying to say we have the child 30% of the time and not 43% of the time (mom needs us to take her extra days so she can take adult vacations, go out for her birthday, someone else's birthday, etc.). The mediator recommended an increase of over \$100 and said my husband is making more money than he actually is. So now here we are having to go in front of another judge for child support. I find it absolutely amazing that in my husband's case he can't ever get a leg up, the judge all but said it's because he is a man. How are we supposed to achieve anything when the courts will not listen. We're going to try to go back again and try for as close to 50/50 as we can get. I do not have high hopes after the last few times. I have a criminal justice degree and work in a state correction institution, and I have lost all faith in the system. I am just glad to see that someone out there is fighting for equality. Thank you for trying to make a difference, it effects more lives and families than you know.

A. Stamateris

Beaufort, SC

I applaud you and your tireless effort! I was divorced in Pa in 1991. Long story and circumstances beyond my control, but I felt I became a criminal defendant simply because my ex wife became unhappy. I had two daughters who I never saw again. The family court system is so ready to make the man out to be a "defendant" he doesn't have a chance at being heard. My time has long past caring.....my children are grown and don't know a thing about me, and I have no idea about them. It's a system that changed my life.....some for the better, because I understood things so much clearer after experiencing Montgomery count family Court. Law is convenience.....that's how I see it now, but for me, life has been good. I moved on, I had to.....it's only degrees of losing in that system. I applaud you trying to do something about it. You're a bigger man than I was.....I walked away, paid my support, and never complained, but I remember how unfair it was. Thank You, alex stamateris

J. Fransico

Reamstown, PA

Request to Share My Story at the HB 1499 Hearing Dear Representative Flick, I respectfully ask for permission to share my story during the upcoming hearing for House Bill 1499. My experience illustrates how Pennsylvania's current custody laws are so broad that they allow excessive judicial discretion without true accountability. In my case, despite no findings of

abuse, neglect, or unfitness, I was coerced into paying for supervised visitation just to see my daughter. I completed four of five required visits before being unfairly terminated over a conflict I did not cause. The service operates like a monopoly—controlling access and communication while offering no real due process or recourse. Before those visits, I was limited to brief phone calls only on birthdays—less than five times a year—and went nearly twenty months with no meaningful contact. Meanwhile, a close friend of the mother tragically died from fentanyl exposure while my daughter was under her care. Yet, the system treated me as the risk, not because of evidence, but because I stood on my God-given and constitutional parental rights. I believe these overly broad laws have allowed some judges and agencies to abuse discretion and process. Families need clearer standards, transparency, and accountability to prevent personal bias from overriding the fundamental right of children to have both parents. I support HB 1499 because it provides that clarity and ensures custody determinations are guided by fairness and fact, not assumption or power imbalance. Thank you for your leadership and for considering my request to speak at this critical hearing.

M. Drake II

New Cumberland, PA

Rep. Flick, We nearly share the same Family Court experiences and i would like to discuss some other shortcomings of the civil court/criminal exploitation during custody, Even down to domestic relations. As a brief background: -My son was taken to CA without my consent at 6 months old. -After filing Emergency Custody (denied), the response was a CA Restraining Order -Missing my sons 1st Christmas, 2 days later i was able to bring him back to PA where i was awarded 'make up time' and then Primary Custody. -2011 I was arrested for DV, PFA was ordered, and multiple PFA violation accusations, ending with mother being threatened of arrest for false accusations. After went to CA to work on her drug addiction and did not come back nor contact my son until 2015. -2015 Another arrest for DV, same as 2011 -2017, addict mother came back, was able to gain custody. -2018, she was able to gain 50/50 -2020, she was awarded primary -2020-2023, had CYS investigations, multiple PFA's issued and many domestics modifications. 2023, son was living with me, went to modify support. Jsdge took the word of mother over documents i provided proving residence. 2024, Pro Se, I was awarded Primary Custody and mother has since seen my son less than 72hrs since March 30th. Meanwhile, on Domestics, Mother was in the arrears for \$15,000+, constantly moving from state to state. As a PA licensed driver, the county and state took no action. DR stated that enforcement is depending on the relationship they have with the payee, which we know is not the case. The system needs to have penalties in place for false accusations, check judges that have a bias record, elimination of mandated support for active parents, etc TEXAS REP GARZA, has introduced a bill, or more, addressing some of these issues successfully. I am also considered a Group Expert in all platforms of Pro Se Dad with founder Anthony Cancel (Florida). I have assisted multiple Pro Se

fathers with navigating the Family Courts and DR as well as PFA and the game play from the mothers using the criminal courts to gain an advantage in court. I would Love to assist in your Family Court fight and offer my experiences that you may not have had the experience with. My Rep, Dawn Keefer, would not assist and i do believe that this is a county to national issue that needs to have addressed and have uniformed rules in how and when as well as penalties that will keep the system in check and unbiased. I would love to schedule a meeting with you to discuss all these issues and resolves, from past to current experiences, to find a solutions or a start to find a solution.

S. McLaughlin

Wynnewood, PA

Disclaimer:

The following statements reflect my personal experiences and opinions as a parent, advocate, and offer suggestions for family law reform. In sharing them here at the Capitol in Harrisburg, I am respectfully exercising my First Amendment right to speak on matters of public concern. Nothing in my statement is intended to disparage or single out individuals.

Family law challenges and custody determinations have become a hidden crisis, in my opinion. Countless good, fit, and willing parents suffer in silence — afraid to speak up for fear of being misunderstood or facing retaliation from an ex-spouse and their attorney(s) for years, often after spending hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal fees, sometimes even more just to achieve and maintain 50/50 custody.

Even when 50/50 custody agreements have been signed, working well, and the children are happy and healthy, months or years later ex-spouses and attorneys can submit new, baseless motions or contempt petitions in an attempt to gain more custody. These filings can be denied for lack of justification, yet they still take a tremendous toll. Such actions are vexatious and place an undue burden on the other parent — financially, emotionally, and through lost quality time with their children. In my opinion, this constitutes a form of legal abuse. Living under the continual threat of being brought back to court can cause anxiety, PTSD-like symptoms, and even physical health consequences such as hypertension or stroke. The long-term stress of legal abuse is real, measurable, and deserves formal medical recognition — perhaps even its own diagnosis code — so the harm it causes can no longer be ignored or minimized, but rather understood, measured, and tracked.

Even when these motions are later dropped or dismissed by a judge, there are no repercussions for the attorney, allowing this pattern to continue without consequence. A clear and accessible process should be created to impose sanctions on baseless motions, ensuring parents are protected from unnecessary legal battles and the emotional harm they cause.

Too often, cases are treated as just another “win” in an attorney’s record — and, in certain instances, as an opportunity for high financial gain through billable hours — rather than being guided by what is truly in the best interest of the children. Those legal fees could instead be invested in the children’s 529 college accounts and their futures.

After speaking with State Representative Flick, I was devastated to learn that Across the United States, approximately 20 good, willing, and fit fathers take their own lives each month after losing their children, homes, financial stability, and hope — all too often destroyed by flaws in the current family law system.

As a proud dad to two amazing children who are thriving, an elementary school paraprofessional, a volunteer firefighter, and a survivor of the current family law system, I care deeply about the safety and future of our children.

I’m not here for myself. I’m here at the Capitol in Harrisburg for the children — and for every parent who has endured this pain or may one day face it. Statistics clearly show what happens when shared parenting is denied:

- Children are twice as likely to abuse drugs or alcohol.
- Children are twice as likely to drop out of school.
- Children are four times more likely to struggle with emotional or behavioral problems.

The bottom line is this: I’m standing up and advocating for what is just and fair, alongside Representative Flick and all the HB1499 co-sponsors, for every parent who simply wants equal time with their children—and for every child who deserves the love and guidance of both parents. Several states across the country already have presumptive 50/50 custody laws in place, and the results show that children benefit from shared parenting by staying in school, avoiding substance abuse, and developing stronger emotional and behavioral health. Pennsylvania has the opportunity to achieve the same positive outcomes by advancing HB1499.

I greatly appreciate your time and support of this essential bill, and for helping advance it toward becoming law in Pennsylvania—ensuring a fair 50/50 custody presumption that truly puts children first. This bill, which will hopefully soon become law, will protect our state’s and nation’s greatest assets—our children and their future. By supporting shared parenting, Pennsylvania can help children stay in school, avoid substance abuse, and reduce emotional and behavioral struggles. As a result, it also has the potential to save the lives of countless good and loving parents who only want to be there for their children. Because when we protect both parents’ ability to love and raise their children, we protect the very foundation of our communities.

M. Strouse

Over the course of 5 years, I stood before a family court judge believing that truth, fairness, and love for my son would prevail. Instead, I left that courtroom stripped of my rights as a father—and with them, the chance to be present in my son's daily life.

What happened in that courtroom was not justice—it was detachment. The decision that day was, to the court, just another case. But to us, it was everything. My son was six years old by the time the process was over. He didn't understand legal terms or court rulings—he only knew that his father was suddenly gone. I watched as the court rewarded manipulative behavior and ignored the importance of a loving, involved father.

The years that followed were a blur of silence and grief. I've spent every day since trying to understand how a system that claims to act "in the best interest of the child" can inflict so much harm. I would sit in my son's room surrounded by his toys, holding on to his memory, wondering if I could go on without him.

I wondered how a system that claims to protect children could so easily destroy the bond between a loving parent and child. I questioned everything—my worth, my faith, even my will to continue. The silence was unbearable.

Yet even in that darkness, there were lessons. I learned that our system does not always value both parents equally. Too often, it assumes that one parent is the "primary caregiver" and the other is optional. But no child should ever be forced to live without the consistent love and guidance of both parents who want to be there. Equal parenting isn't about fairness to parents—it's about the well-being of the child.

Family court is supposed to protect children, but it too often rewards manipulation, punishes honesty, and treats fathers as disposable. I've seen firsthand how bias and exhaustion can lead judges to make life-altering rulings without understanding the families before them. It's easier to say "I find one parent more credible" than to seek the truth buried in the pain.

To Judge Linhardt and those who serve in positions of power: I pray for you. I pray that you find the courage to do what is right, even when no one is watching. I pray that the damage you have caused might open your eyes to the harm that indifference brings. Your rulings echo for a lifetime. I pray for my son most of all—that he grows up unbroken, that he refuses to be defined by the pain others inflicted, and that he becomes a better man than the system that failed him. I pray that no other father and son endure what we did. I pray that judges remember that empathy is not a weakness, but the foundation of justice. And I again pray for my son—that he grows strong enough to overcome what the system took from him.

I pray that someday no parent will have to beg to be part of their child's life the way I have.

I share this today not out of anger, but out of conviction. Our courts need reform. Our judges need training, accountability, and compassion. Our laws must reflect the truth that children deserve both parents. Equal parenting isn't just a legal issue—it's a moral one. It's about ensuring that no child grows up feeling abandoned when love was there all along.

M. Remeikis
Cumberland County, Pennsylvania

Father of Two Boys | Advocate for Equal Parenting Rights | Victim of Injustice
A Father's Story: Why We Need 50/50 Custody Reform

My name is M. Remeikis, and I am a proud father of two wonderful boys. From the day they were born, their safety and happiness have been my top priority. I've always been an active, loving, and responsible parent. On June 14, 2024, my wife of nine years filed a false Protection From Abuse (PFA) order against me. Judge Siebert of Cumberland County did not grant her the PFA, but my attorney advised me to agree to a one-year PFA to resolve the matter quickly—a decision I should have never made. At that hearing, Judge Siebert told my wife, "It's clear he's never been a danger to his kids, and you are not afraid of him at all. "Only a week before that filing, I discovered that she had been involved in multiple affairs, including one that had just come to light. Within days of being confronted about her infidelity, she turned to false allegations and began using the legal system as a weapon to gain control and punish me. Two weeks later, she falsely accused me of rape. Over the following weeks, I was arrested multiple times for alleged PFA violations that were fabricated or baseless. On September 1, 2024, Middlesex Township Detective Dylan Kuhn filed rape charges against me. I immediately turned myself in, yet Magistrate Judge Rogers of Middlesex Township denied bail, and I spent a month in the Cumberland County Prison until Judge Matt Smith later granted bail, which I posted at \$25,000. During that time, I was cut off from my children. After another month, I was granted supervised visits—only four hours per week—at my own expense.

In June 2025, I was removed from the ABC visitation house for something as harmless as using a public restroom with my kids. That day—June 4, 2025—was the last time I saw or spoke to my sons. At a recent hearing, a therapist hired by my wife admitted that my youngest son Kai said, "My mom is lying about Dad to get him in trouble," and that "my dad doesn't lie about anything—I miss him." The therapist confirmed that Kai becomes inconsolable when asked about his father. My wife has bipolar disorder, OCD, and ADHD, and a 13-year history of opioid addiction including long-term Suboxone use. She has been in and out of rehab and once faced CYS involvement for taking opiates while breastfeeding.

In 2020, she filed a CYS report against me that was fully investigated and came back unfounded. Around the same time she filed the PFA in 2024, she filed another CYS report, which was also unfounded. These repeated false reports and allegations were deliberate tools to remove my children from me and destroy my relationship with them.

Over the past 13 months, I have been incarcerated, forced to sell my home, lost my business, been separated from my children, and burdened with overwhelming legal costs. This is not justice. It is systemic abuse—against fathers, against children, and against families. A Broken System Pennsylvania’s family courts and PFA process are being weaponized. False allegations have become tools to gain custody and control, destroying relationships between fathers and their children. The Kayden’s Law framework, though created with good intentions, has opened the door for manipulation and parental alienation. Law enforcement and prosecutors often act without full investigation, assuming guilt before evidence. Fathers are punished first and forced to prove their innocence later—while their children pay the price.

In my case, Judge Matt Smith, Prosecutor Lizz Judd, Detective Dylan Kuhn, Magistrate Judge Rogers, District Attorney Sean McCormick, and Judge Jessica Brewbaker have each played roles in this ongoing injustice. Fathers Matter — and the Data Proves It The statistics are undeniable: boys who grow up without their fathers are far more likely to struggle in school, suffer from depression, use drugs, and end up in the criminal justice system. They’re more likely to drop out, live in poverty, and less likely to form stable families of their own. Our kids deserve better. Fathers are just as important as mothers, and the law must finally reflect that truth.

A Call for Change

I urge Pennsylvania lawmakers to make 50/50 shared custody the default presumption unless clear, credible evidence shows otherwise. We must also reform PFA laws to prevent misuse in custody disputes, hold false accusers accountable, ensure independent, evidence-based investigations before charging parents, and require courts to fairly consider mental-health and addiction histories in custody rulings.

Closing

I love my children deeply, and they love and miss me. No parent should have to fight this hard just to be part of their children’s lives. This isn’t a partisan issue—it’s a human issue. Fathers matter. Boys need their dads. Families deserve fairness. Thank you, Senator Flick, for listening and for standing up for fathers, mothers, and—most importantly—the children of Pennsylvania.

A. Truckenmiller

Hello my name is A. Truckenmiller. I’m writing this in regards to a current custody matter I’ve been spending over a year of my life on for physical time with our son. I’m proud to be a life long resident of Northumberland County. I wish to better the terrible experience I had to go through. I pray others who might unfortunately find themselves in the same situation as I, to have a better experience. I’ve serve’d my church, my family, and our great nation in the USAF. I’ve been farming with my father for the past 17 years and we sold our dairy herd last December. When it came to custody, I’ve been treated to feel like a liar going up against the GAL. My

experience with the GAL is all half truths at very best. For example, I told the GAL I'd give up a part weekend with our child for 50/50 physical custody. In the GAL report it didn't mention the 50/50 part just that I'd give up time with him over a weekend. There hasn't even been an open opportunity for me to speak in court. I'd like to let the Judge know what the full truth is and how I do all I can humanly possible for our son. I have a lawyer that represents me and I feel he try's. I also feel at times, he goes along with a sad old school tradition of making everything iron clad with our opposition and GAL well in advance. It's clear that when we do get to court the Judge already expects lawyers to have everything a made deal. I then have no way to get a word in as a father or heard from myself to the actual Judge.

All this back and forth for physical time has driven his mother to a sad a mental state and I understand why. This system is set up to constantly break the partnership that should exist between a mother and a father. I do hold myself together without meds and like her I've sought out counseling. I want to make sure I too am doing all I can to be the best father possible. Sadly I find myself fighting a battle that won't be fair because I'm the Father. I pray to get this better for future generations.

M. McLaughlin

East Brunswick, NJ

I do not live in Pennsylvania. However, I am very interested and impressed with your stand on this issue. I only wish my state of New Jersey was more verbal on this issue.

I am at a loss to understand how 50/50 Custody is not the default. I speak from experience the damage not having both parents in your life equally can do. I, myself lost my own father to cancer when I was a teenager and I promise you, I feel that loss every day for nearly the last 40 years.

I am also a "single mother". My sons were 2, 4 and 10 when their father and I separated. He left their lives when my youngest so was 10 when he started a new family and moved out of state. He has had no contact by his choice since that time. The challenges that my children and I faced are numerous. The loneliness, feelings of abandonment, desire for inclusion are only a few of the results. We were extremely fortunate to have supportive family with established relationships in very close proximity; including members of law enforcement, social services, education. I cannot imagine the repercussions without that community.

Divorce and separation brings a lot of pain and hurt feelings to the surface. How can a man who was "a great father" a day before, then be charged with a claim of domestic violence the day he files for divorce? How does a judge not see that clear and obvious path. How come, in New Jersey, a person; upon learning that their partner wants to leave, knowing how to upset their partner and then starts filming ONLY their very poor reaction and not what lead up to it? The

undue stress and anxiety this situation causes is detrimental to all. It is all very sad. And there should be repercussions for the manipulating party as well as the reactive party.

I feel my story comes from a different perspective. If there is anything I can do to help, please allow me to do that. We need to do this for our families. This needs to be fixed for our children. Fathers Matter. Children have the right to healthy relationships with BOTH their parents.

J. Chesney

Pittsburgh, PA

Here is a summary of my experience of obstruction, as a safe parent in Allegheny County Family Division, Pittsburgh PA. Discriminatory Conduct: A nearly 13-year pattern of systemic discrimination and judicial misconduct within the Allegheny County Family Division has obstructed my parental and human rights. The courts were a direct catalyst for my complete ruin and the erasure of my child from my life. This misconduct includes deliberate judicial actions that prevented me from exercising my fundamental right to parent my child and actively facilitated parental alienation. This misconduct is evidenced by: • Judge Jennifer Satler. The child was improperly taken to see the judge with opposing counsel prior to the trial. On the stand, the child was coached to make false statements(perjury), resulting in an order for me to go to therapy, which further burdened my already complicated schedule, and made me responsible for 100% transportation against previous status quo. She also attempted to sell my home for non-payment of child support, despite my ex not paying, and held me in contempt based on fraud. This punitive burden on me as a single working mother was a direct cause of my job loss and the forced sale of my home. • Judge Kathleen Mulligan: I witnessed her engaging in ex parte communication with opposing counsel. She then ignored compelling medical evidence of my daughter's abuse and denied a Protection from Abuse (PFA) order, which left my child under the full control of an abuser. • Judge Chelsea Wagner Demonstrated an appearance of bias by ruling in favor of opposing counsel against my motion for alienation and interference, based on fraudulent claims without refute. • Judge Patrick Sweeney: Ignored over 100 pages of evidence and dismissed a motion on a technicality, allowing the alienation and interference to continue unabated. • Sean Lardo(defendant) & Stephanie Cervone, Esq: colluded and conspired with intentional and malicious infliction to distress and obstruct my protected right as a mother through fraud, slander and malpractice. The judges' bias was apparent when the defendant hired attorney Stephanie Cervone, as I have evidence of other parents who had previously lost their cases and then won after hiring her since 2016. I directly referred these to prove this. The evidence is clear that I was discriminated against because of my protected class as a parent, and more specifically a mother. The actions taken by the court have shown a clear pattern of systemic misconduct, including judicial bias that has favored the father and disregarded my rights and evidence, in violation of Section 5 of the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act, 43 P.S. 55 951-

963, which prohibits unlawful discriminatory practices. This conduct also appears to violate the Pennsylvania Code of Judicial Conduct, which requires judges to perform their duties fairly, impartially, and diligently, and to avoid impropriety and the appearance of impropriety. The rulings and dismissals of evidence have created different and unequal terms and conditions of services provided by the court, based on my status as a mother. Here are the details with evidence in form of a motion that I submitted last March. (Note: this motion was created this way in order to present this evidence for future litigation to remedy the situation outside of Family Court, as it's corrupt and I knew the judge would ignore my evidence, further obstructing my rights) Link:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1uHxYacFgRwBMHCLmu90SxL15UHe7ALOT/view?usp=drive_sdk I hope this helps and we can use this information to make change. Btw: I started a group called the Allegheny County Family Rights Coalition as an outlet to educate, support other parents, and make change through referendums. Please let me know how I can help.

Speaker: Richard Kenton Rose

Counties: Westmoreland & Blair County

Subject: Support for HB1499 – Family Court Reform

Chair, members of the committee — thank you for the opportunity to speak.

My name is **Richard Kenton Rose**, and I am here to express strong support for **HB1499**, because my experience with the family courts in Westmoreland County and Blair County shows exactly why these reforms are urgently needed.

I am a male victim of domestic violence with **no criminal record and no history of violence**. Despite this, I was **barred from attending my own custody hearings**, denied the ability to present evidence, and stripped of the most basic due-process right — the right to be heard.

My visitation was removed based on a **false allegation of abuse** made by the custodial parent — who is not only a **mandated reporter**, but a **Pre-K Counts teacher responsible for young children**. She has **multiple prior convictions and charges for causing harm**, including violence committed against me. Yet she never contacted ChildLine, CYS, law enforcement, the PFA office, the school, or medical providers.

Instead, she filed a **secret ex parte emergency petition** with no safety reporting and no investigation.

What's worse — **that petition was never served on me**.

She was given **months to prepare**, while I received only **a few days' notice**, and only because a court staff member informally told me to "be present."

I was **never told the reason for the hearing**, never given the allegations, and never given the evidence against me — because none existed.

HB1499's requirements for factual findings, verification, and transparency in emergency proceedings directly address this abuse of process.

Even more disturbing:

I had legitimate **protection orders to protect me and my child**. A family court judge forced me to **drop those protection orders** as a condition for seeing my child — **after openly acknowledging judicial bias and a familial connection with my child's mother**, who was the abuser. No court should ever operate this way. HB1499's neutrality and conflict-of-interest protections are essential to restoring trust in the system.

In Blair County, the Custody Conference Officer assigned to my case previously prosecuted me in what later proved to be a **wrongful arrest**, yet that conflict was ignored. Internal relationships were valued above truth or law.

Additionally, the **Child Support Enforcement Agency functions as the Clerk of Orphans' Court**, allowing enforcement officers to act as gatekeeper, docket clerk, trier of fact, and de facto judge. This violates separation of powers and denies parents access to an actual judicial process. HB1499's structural reforms are desperately needed.

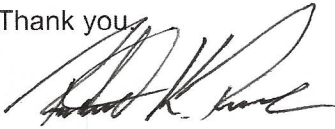
I cannot say whether HB1499 can repair the damage already done to my relationship with my son. That may take years.

But I *can* say this: **If HB1499 becomes law, my son will have a fairer, more transparent, and more accountable system if he ever needs the courts in the future.**

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to pass HB1499.

Additionally, in both counties **support matters are routinely blocked from access to appeals**, leaving parents with no meaningful avenue to challenge unlawful calculations, administrative errors, or due-process violations. This denial of appellate review further illustrates why HB1499's structural reforms are urgently needed.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert K. Howard". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "R" and "H".



D is Not for Dad—Or for Doing Right by Pennsylvania’s Children

The **National Parents Organization** has recently released its latest **Shared Parenting Report Card**, grading each state on how well its custody statutes promote equal access to both parents after divorce or separation. Pennsylvania’s grade? **A disappointing D.**

Let’s be clear—**D** is not for **Dad**, and it’s certainly **not for “Doing the Right Thing.”** It’s a sign that our state continues to fail families and fall short on prioritizing what’s best for children.

Here’s what earned us that “**D**”: While Pennsylvania law includes a “friendly parent” factor—asking courts to consider which parent is more likely to encourage ongoing contact with the other—there is no statutory preference or presumption for shared parenting. Courts are **not required** to start with the idea that **children should have meaningful time with both parents**. And that’s a problem. Numerous **studies show** that, when both parents are fit and loving, **shared parenting results in better outcomes for children**—emotionally, socially, and academically.

We know this. The research is overwhelming. Yet **Pennsylvania’s laws lag** behind.

Even recent legislative efforts like SB55 (Kayden’s Law) have **chipped away at what little support existed**. While protecting children from harm is absolutely essential, the revised law actually **downgrades** the “friendly parent” consideration, giving it **less weight when determining custody**. Meanwhile, Pennsylvania has no legal presumption of equal parenting time, no specific policies to promote shared custody during temporary orders, and no protections against false allegations of abuse, which can unjustly strip a parent of access to their child.

Contrast this with Kentucky, which in 2018 became the first state to pass a law with a rebuttable presumption of equal parenting time. Since then, that state has seen a **drop in court filings, reduced conflict, and stronger outcomes for children**. Kentucky’s grade on the Shared Parenting Report Card? An A.

Our neighbors are moving forward, while Pennsylvania stands still. And our kids are paying the price.

We were horrified by the family separations at the southern border—but many of us **remain silent** when our own family courts separate children from loving, capable parents every day. The trauma is real. Ask any child who only sees their mom or dad a few days a month, or who was told they could no longer live with the parent who tucked them in every night.

It’s time to act. Shared parenting should be the default, not the exception, when both parents are fit. Judges must still have discretion, but only when there’s a real and proven threat—not because one parent is better at hiring a lawyer or winning a custody battle.

Pennsylvania’s children deserve better. Let’s fix this system before another generation grows up asking why we didn’t. **Vote YES on HB 1499**



Written Testimony in Support of Pennsylvania House Bill 1499

RE: House Bill 1499

Position: **In Support**

Submitted by: Rael LaPenta, Mothers Against Child Abuse (MACA)

To: Pennsylvania House Judiciary Committee — November 18, 2025

My name is Rael LaPenta, and I write on behalf of Mothers Against Child Abuse (MACA), a national organization dedicated to advocating for child safety and protecting children from all forms of maltreatment—including emotional, psychological, and coercive abuse.

On behalf of MACA, I respectfully submit this written testimony of HB 1499.

Chairman, Members of the Committee, and Honored Legislators,

As mothers, we come together not for mothers or fathers, but for children—to ensure Pennsylvania law reflects what is best for their safety, stability, and lifelong well-being. HB 1499 does precisely that.

1. Protecting Children’s Emotional and Psychological Safety

Pennsylvania’s custody statute (§ 5322) already defines a child’s “safety” to include physical, emotional, and psychological well-being.

HB 1499 reinforces this foundation by ensuring that—whenever safe and appropriate—children maintain strong, consistent relationships with both parents.

Research confirms that children who have meaningful contact with both parents are at lower risk of depression, anxiety, substance use, and educational decline after family separation. Equal parenting is not a privilege for parents; it is a protective factor for children. (*Please look to the bibliography for cited research*)

2. Reducing Conflict and Litigation

By establishing equal parenting time as the starting point, HB 1499 helps shift court focus from parental competition to cooperative problem-solving.

States that have enacted shared-parenting presumptions report fewer custody disputes, faster settlements, and reduced court congestion—allowing courts to focus on true risk cases involving proven abuse or neglect.

3. Ensuring Accountability and Judicial Clarity

HB 1499 strengthens judicial integrity by requiring specific written findings of fact whenever a judge deviates from the equal-time presumption.

This transparency ensures that custody decisions are guided by evidence—not bias, guesswork, or local custom—and that both parents understand the reasoning behind the outcome.

4. Balancing Fairness with Safety

The bill preserves judicial discretion and child-safety exceptions. It does not apply when there is credible evidence of abuse, coercive control, or neglect.

Instead, it guarantees that both parents begin on equal footing—promoting fairness while safeguarding children in unsafe environments.

5. Aligning Pennsylvania with Research and National Best Practices

Decades of empirical research across multiple jurisdictions conclude that children fare best—academically, emotionally, and socially—when both fit, loving parents remain actively involved.

HB 1499 modernizes Pennsylvania’s family-law framework, aligning it with the overwhelming scientific consensus that shared parenting, when safe, is the optimal standard.

6. Real-World Evidence: The Kentucky Model

The experience of Kentucky demonstrates that a default presumption of equal parenting time is both fair and effective.

According to the National Parents Organization (NPO), after Kentucky adopted its shared-parenting law, the state’s divorce rate dropped by 25%, far exceeding the national average. This decline suggests that when parents know they will both remain meaningfully involved in their children’s lives, they cooperate more and litigate less.

Importantly, Kentucky’s law retains strong safeguards for families where abuse or domestic violence is substantiated—showing that fairness and safety can coexist.

Pennsylvania’s HB 1499 follows this same balanced, data-driven approach.



7. Reflecting the Will of Pennsylvania Families

Polling by the National Parents Organization shows overwhelming public support for shared parenting in Pennsylvania—cutting across gender, political, and socioeconomic lines.

In a 2022 NPO survey, 83% of Pennsylvanians agreed that children benefit from equal time with both parents when both are fit and loving.

Our citizens recognize what science already proves: children need both parents, and the law should presume that—unless shown otherwise.

Conclusion

Children deserve courts that begin from a place of balance, safety, and evidence—not bias or outdated assumptions. HB 1499 honors both science and common sense.

On behalf of Mothers Against Child Abuse, I respectfully urge the Judiciary Committee and full legislature to vote YES on HB 1499—for the children of Pennsylvania, for their stability, and for their future.

Thank you for your time and dedication to protecting children.

Respectfully submitted,

Rael LaPenta, On behalf of Mothers Against Child Abuse (MACA)

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*“Children in **joint physical or legal custody** were **better adjusted** than those in sole-custody settings, and similar to those in intact families.”*
3. Steinbach, A., & Augustijn, L. (2022). Children's Well-Being in Sole and Joint Physical Custody Families. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 36(2), 301–311. doi:[10.1037/fam0000875](https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0000875)

*“The bivariate results provided support for the hypothesis that children living in JPC (Joint Physical Custody) families fare **significantly better** than children living in SPC(Sole Physical Custody) families*

4. Nielsen, L. (2018). [Joint Versus Sole Physical Custody: Outcomes for Children Independent of Family Income or Parental Conflict](#). Journal of Child Custody, 15(1), 35–54.

*“In the 60 studies published in English in academic journals or in government reports, 34 studies found that JPC children had **better outcomes on all of the measures of behavioral, emotional, physical, and academic well-being and relationships with parents and grandparents**. In 14 studies, JPC children had equal outcomes on some measures and better outcomes on others compared to SPC children. In 6 studies JPC and SPC children were equal on all measures.”*

5. Meyer, D., Cancian, M., & Cook, S. (2019). [Changes in Placement After Divorce and Implications for Child Support Policy](#). Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin–Madison.

*“straightforward comparisons show that in general, **cases with shared placement are less likely to have a child support order; but once there is an order, they are more likely to receive something and to receive the full amount.**”*

6. Steinbach, A. (2019)). [Children’s and Parents’ Well-Being in Joint Physical Custody: A Literature Review](#). Family Process, 10(10), 1–20.

*“In sum, there is **empirical evidence** from different countries that suggests that JPC arrangements can have **positive effects on the well-being of children and of parents.**”*

7. Vowels, L. M., Ledgerwood, D. M., & Westrupp, E. M. (2023). Systematic Review and Theoretical Comparison of Children’s Outcomes in Post-Separation Living Arrangements. PLOS ONE, 18(6), e0288112. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0288112>

*“between January 2010-December 2022, compared the living arrangements across five domains of children’s outcomes: **emotional, behavioral, relational, physical, and educational**. The results showed that children’s outcomes were the best in nuclear families but in **75% of the studies children in Shared Physical Custody arrangements had equal outcomes. Children in Lone Physical Custody tended to report the worst outcomes.**”*

8. Fernández-Kranz, D., & Nollenberger, N. (2022). [The Impact of Equal Parenting Time Laws on Family Outcomes and Risky Behavior by Teenagers: Evidence from Spain](#). Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization, 195, 303–325.

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Only to oppose high conflict rebuttal

14. Braver, S. L., & Votruba, A. M. (2021). [Does Shared Parenting “Cause” Children’s Better Outcomes? In High Conflict Divorced Families?](#) J. M. de Torres Perea, E. Kruk, & M. Ortiz-Tallo (Eds.), The Routledge International Handbook of Shared Parenting and Best Interest of the Child. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

“high quality of parenting by at least 1 parent is associated with better child adjustment in high-conflict divorces.”

Addendum: Recommended Handouts

1. **Myths and Truths about Shared Parenting and Child Well-Being**

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e28a95cdc8bed16729b93de/t/63221f76bd37fe2d23cc98d1/1663180662380/Shared+Parenting+Myths+and+Facts.pdf>

2. **Myths and Truths about Shared Parenting—Beyond Children’s Well-Being**

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e28a95cdc8bed16729b93de/t/6400fce6d4c25d5dde1c9014/1677786355373/Shared+Parenting+Myths+and+Facts+%28Beyond+Child+Well-Being%29.pdf>

3. **Shared Parenting and Child Abuse and Neglect: An Ohio Study**

“Counties with equal or nearly equal parenting time rules consistently show lower and declining rates of child abuse and neglect.”

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e28a95cdc8bed16729b93de/t/63fd03169713e651626d8254/1677525782296/Shared+Parenting+and+Child+Abuse+and+Neglect+-+An+Ohio+Study.docx.pdf>

4. **Equal Shared Parenting and Domestic Violence: Paying Attention to the Data**

“Available data indicate that far from fueling domestic violence, presumptions of shared parenting reduce its incidence.”

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e28a95cdc8bed16729b93de/t/63fd025a9d120a22593e2230/1677525594381/Shared+Parenting+%26+Domestic+Violence+-+Paying+Attention+to+the+Data.pdf>