

Good Morning Honored members of the House Judiciary subcommittee on Family Law.

My name is Larry Shapiro and first and foremost I am here as a father. Today I am here to represent Pennsylvania Families and Children's Equality, a self-help support group for non-custodial parents.

I would like to tell you how passing a joint custody bill will save the state hundreds of millions of dollars annually and to offer some changes to the current proposed bills. I would first like address some of the changes that PA FACE would like to see included in these bills and some of the good points of both of them.

PAFACE believes that the current proposed bills are a step in the right direction of doing what is in the best interest of our children.

There are a few points in the bills, which could use modification as follows:

- Relocation: This section should put the burden of proof on the parent desiring to relocate not on the other parent.
- Protection from Abuse Orders: These are used all too often as just a tool to obtain custody. When a person agrees to a Protection order without admitting guilt or an order is dismissed that order should not be allowed to be entered as evidence in a custody action.
- One of the best provisions of HB 1639 is that it finally awards some rights to grandparents and allows them to be grandparents.
- Also included in both bills is the requirement for a parenting plan whose purpose would be to set an agenda not only on how the children are to be raised, but to also include ways to settle disputes without costly court battles.

When one of these historic bills, or a combination of them, is finally passed, it will allow the children of divorce and/or separation in Pennsylvania to have equal access to both parents. This is a concept that the majority of the States of this great nation already recognize as being in the best interest of the children of their states. Nevertheless, for some reason the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania still refuses to make this necessary and important investment in the future of our children and out state by allowing them to have equal access to both of their parents.

Even President Obama stated in his Father's Day address that this country needs more involvement by fathers in the lives of our children. Yet Pennsylvania refuses to accept this idea.

I am sure we can all agree that children of divorce and separation are hurt emotionally by not having equal access to both parents. Many times, they are even forced to take sides in any ensuing custody battle.

I am here today not to address something we all know and accept as a fact, that emotional harm is done to our children of divorce and separation. I am here today to explain to you the financial harm done to our state and national economies as a whole due to the fact that Pennsylvania still does not have a joint custody bill as do the majority of the states in this nation.

The following statistics were taken from an article in the Bucks County Courier Times dated June 21, 2009. The article stated that all of the following statistics are from the Federal Government.

- 65% of all youth suicides are from Fatherless Homes.
According to Pennsylvania Youth Suicide Prevention teen suicides cost our national economy almost three million dollars a year.
- 71% of all high school dropouts come from fatherless homes
- According to data from a Business 2 Business article dated Oct 2007 High School dropouts, which number 700,000/year nationwide, costs our economy \$45 billion in lost taxes and increased government expenses, e.g. Welfare payment, health care, and other government programs for undereducated people.
- A high school dropout earns one million dollars less in their lifetime.
In Pennsylvania, alone 10% of all 16-21 year olds are either not in school or gainfully employed.
In the 2001-2002 Pennsylvania freshman high school class, 22% of the students failed to graduate high school four years later.

- 75% of all adolescents in drug rehabilitation clinics come from fatherless homes

- 85% of all convicted felons grew up without a father at home
Pennsylvania's prison population in 2006 was 45,000 up 20% from 2000. In 2007, according an article in the Philadelphia Inquirer that population is now at almost 51,000 and the state has run out of room for more prisoners. To keep a prisoner in a state prison costs \$40,000/year. To keep a prisoner in a county prison costs \$18,000/year. To keep a prisoner over the age of 65 in prison costs between \$65,000 and \$100,000/year.

70-80% of all prisoners have a drug or alcohol problem.

40% of all prisoners are high school dropouts.

In the same article in the Philadelphia Inquirer dated Monday September 7, 2009 quoted above Pennsylvania prisons are so overcrowded that the state is now being forced to borrow \$800,000,000 to build four new prisons which will be overcrowded as soon as they are opened.

- 90% of all runaways are from fatherless homes

In addition, I have found the following statistics that are just as scary.

- 70% of all juveniles in state operated institutions come from fatherless homes
U.S. Department of Justice, Special Report September 1988

- 80% of all rapists motivated with displaced anger come from fatherless homes

Criminal Justice and Behavior Vol 14 pages 403 and 426

By any measure, these are frightening statistics but the financial implications of keeping our children separated from both parents are even worse.

We simply cannot afford to keep our children from being raised by both parents equally. Even when taking into account the \$25 million the state receives annually via Title IVD we would still be better off financially if our children had equal access to both parents. Passage of a joint custody bill will not only allow our children the benefit of having both of their loving parents in their lives but will save the state millions upon millions of dollars in other unrelated costs and expenses. It is a win-win situation we save our children and we save the State money.

Thank you very much for your time. Again, my name is Larry Shapiro and I am from Pennsylvania Families and Children's Equality. Children deserve and need both parents. At this time, I would like to ask this esteemed panel if they had any questions that they would like to ask me. Now I would like to introduce our next speaker Mr. Bill Gibbons.