

Official Written Testimony
In Support of
House Bill 1397 - Equality in Parenting Time

House Judiciary Subcommittee on Family Law
December 9, 2019, Room 60 East Wing
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Thank you, Chairman and Members of the Committee, for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 1397. My name is Justin Poe. I'm a Leasing and Rental Assistant from Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. I'm also a Rotarian, member of the Greater Chambersburg Chamber of Commerce, admin of PAFamilyLawReform, a non-organizational Shared Parenting advocacy group and most important, father of three children.

February 2020 marks the 10-year anniversary of the worst experience of my life. A failed relationship turned into a high-conflict separation that yielded a severe case of Parental Alienation. My daughter was taken and turned against me for four years. I spent more than \$40,000.00 in legal fees defending my right to have equal time and equal access with my daughter. After four years in family court, my case took a bazaar and unexpected turn when the mother of my child unexpectedly passed away. Franklin County withdrew from my case. I went from court ordered supervised visits to full custody as if none of this ever happened.

I later married. Together my wife and I terminated the parental rights of her ex-partner, an abusive dead-beat dad who didn't want any part in raising his daughter. We petitioned the court so that I could adopt. The entire process went uncontested by the biological father. Franklin County granted me the adoption and a decree that reads: "the best interests and welfare of the person proposed to be adopted will be promoted by such adoption".

Within two years, my marriage dissolved, and we divorced peacefully. My ex-wife and I shared custody of my youngest child Equally until an unexpected financial situation arose. Time with my daughter diminished and I ended up in family court once again. I submitted Rule 1915.3-2, Criminal Record / Abuse History Verification, proving that I have no criminal record and that I am fit, willing and able to be a parent. After adopting my child, asking the court for equal time and equal access, waiting eleven months and spending more than \$11,000.00 in legal fees, I was awarded 43 % custody: one month less per year than an Equally shared 50/50 split. It was just enough of an unfair judgement, for the attorneys, and judges to capitalize on my divorce and the domestic relations section to receive maximum Title IV-D performance, funding and incentives.

This new visitation schedule didn't align with my ex-wife's work schedule, so she asked to switch days. My only option was to return to our shared equal schedule, and that we worked out "child support" between us. It worked! My ex-wife and I share custody of my daughter equally and we have a support agreement outside of the DRS. I'm unaffected.

Since sharing custody equally and returning to the 50/50 schedule, my youngest daughter's grades returned to straight A's. She more engaged in class and at home. She was recognized as student of the week at her elementary school. She's more social, outgoing and joined a gymnastics and cheer team this fall.

When the custody case for my oldest daughter ended, the stress of being alienated ended and we quickly rebuilt a strong, healthy loving relationship. Since I was no longer paying child support and attorney fees, I could afford to get her braces. Her self-esteem and grades skyrocketed. She excelled in High School band, jazz band, marching band and orchestra. She won a scholarship for her achievements in music. She also joined the Shippensburg Community Band and volunteered at NETWORK Ministries teaching other children to play the piano. I could afford a professional model saxophone and her skills and talent excelled, motivating her to pursue a career in music. Today, she's attending her second year in college, studying music education and music theory with hopes of teaching High School Band or College level music theory.

My children's success and achievements prove clearly that shared equal custody works and is what's best. I understand there are isolated cases where some parents shouldn't be involved however, the way our current law stands, and the way family court operates, fit, willing and able loving parents are being forced out by the system. In fact, it's incentivized by millions of Title IV-D dollars and corresponding cooperative agreements in every county. There's no safeguard. A parent shouldn't have to wait a year or spend \$10,000 to have equal time and equal access with their children. House Bill 1397 would reduce this conflict. It would protect the parent-child and extended family relationships. It would reduce litigation costs and provide needed certainty in law, bettering the lives of our children. Please support House Bill 1397.

Sincerely,
Justin Poe