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I came here to ask for you to pass

Good Afternoon, my name is Carolyn Gunn and I am the mother of three beautiful children. Caitlyn is 15, Brianna is 9 and Rian is 7. It has been over 3 years since I have had any relationship with my girls and a little over a year since I have had any relationship with my son.

In here to tell you our family court system is severely broken.
I was married to my children's father for 10 years. During that time he was arrested three times for

Domestic Violence towards me. There were countless incidents that went unreported. I was verbally and mental abused, ~~he cheated on me more times than I care to remember, so in 2007 when our son was born and he decided to move out of our marital home to have yet another affair, I filed for divorce.~~

Just before our divorce was finalized in August of 2008, my now ex-husband came after me with a baseball bat. ~~He told my oldest daughter Caitlyn the bat was not to play ball with but to hurt and kill people.~~ This incident happened in front of our children who at the time were 8 and 2 years old and our son was only a few months old. Not only was he charged with DV and felony menacing, he also received an allegation of child engagement with the Adams County Department of Social Services. The felony menacing was pleaded down to harassment charges; he was charged with Domestic Violence and placed on probation.

and I was awarded sole decision making
Our divorce was finalized in August of 2008, ~~and due to the DV charges and that he refused to cooperate with the Child Family Investigator at the time I was awarded sole decision making. My ex-husband was to undergo a psych evaluation, have supervised visits and once he could prove he was not a risk to the children he could have regular parenting time with all three children.~~

~~My kids were suffering, especially my oldest child Caitlyn. She wanted a relationship with her father and she had already gone months without any contact due to protection orders that had been put into place because of the baseball bat incident. After numerous conversations with my ex-husband's girlfriend, now his current wife, staying he had changed and she would make sure the children would be safe. I kept hearing that my ex couldn't afford the psych evaluation, it was going to cost him thousands of~~

dollars and he no idea where to turn for supervised visits. I now know these were manipulation tactics, but at the time I didn't know any better. So I finally caved and I asked my attorney to modify the final divorce decree to do away with the psych evaluation, and he was able to have about ¼ parenting time with our children. At the time I really felt I was making the right decisions for our children. I felt that no matter how dysfunctional our relationship was, the children deserved to have a relationship with their father.

~~I think it is important for you to know that he violated his probation with his fourth DUI and a violation of the protection order because he was becoming more and more verbally abusive in text messages and how he would communicate with me.~~

So fast forward, in 2012, four years after our divorce had been filed, I was back in court to modify his parenting time. I was concerned about allegations of mental abuse toward the children. He had a friend, a Commerce City Police officer, hand cuffed our oldest daughter who was only 11 and place her in the back of her squad car and threaten to take her to juvenile detention as a way to punish her for lying. I still am unsure of the officer's full name, but have some ideas. My oldest kept refusing to go to for visits because she was always being grounded while visiting with her father. Most times I would tell her that he loves you and this is his weekend to spend time with you. What he decides in his home is his decision. The few times I allowed her to stay with me, I had the police contact me saying I kidnapped my daughter, or reports of my oldest being a runaway. None of which was true and I had shown the officers text messages letting my ex-husband know what was going on and my concerns. Each time the officer would say this is a civil matter and should be dealt with in family court. My son said on a few occasions that his dad and step mom made him sit in a high chair at the age of 4 because he was acting out at the dinner table. He would come and tell me, "Mommy, I'm not a baby and I don't like this." And my two youngest kept coming home to me with unexplained bruises on their arms, that looked like finger marks

from grabbing on to their wrist too hard. There were also many other issues with continued abuse from my ex-husband.

I had an attorney and so did my ex-husband. However the case was built solely on perception and not the fact that I just stated had happen to my children and I. Because my ex made a lot more money than I did and he could afford the better lawyer. I felt so beat up in the court system. I felt like things kept going from bad to worse. I never knew what was going to happen next.

My girls made false allegations about me yelling at them and being drunk and passed out. Brianna, who at the time was only 7 told me I was dead to her and wrote me a card with skulls on it saying I hate you, you are not my mommy. My oldest Caitlyn soon turned on me too and refused to come to court order visits.

My case was build on false accusations and percepti
In the end the courts gave my ex-husband sole decision making, I was no longer allowed to have contact with my girls until they wanted to contact me. I had weekly visits with my son for a few hours each week until he decided he no longer wanted to see me and decided like his sisters that he hated me.

The courts did nothing in our hearing. Facts were dismissed and overlooked. I was made out to be a horrible parent, based solely on perception. I have spent thousands of dollars and at times feel like I should just give up. I miss my children every day.

Since the case closed two years ago, my oldest child Caitlyn suffers from depression and has been hospitalized twice for cutting and suicidal idealization, I'm told Brianna suffers from abandonment and has signs of PTSD. My son, well I don't know because I am not allowed to talk with therapists because my ex-husband has refused to sign a release of information for therapists or the children's doctors. I have battled depression and I have signs of PTSD. I work with my therapist to overcome the pain of not having my children in my life.

People who know me will say I was a very loving, caring parent. I was involved in my children's schools and extracurricular activities. I was very present in all of their lives. Before all of this, I had a wonderful relationship with all three of my children. Today, I'm not sure I will ever be able to have that same loving relationship. The kids don't have a relationship with anyone on my side of the family. It's been sad to watch and hard to believe it happened to me.

I ask you today to please pass this law to prevent this from happen to other parents. And allow those of us who have had our children legally kidnapped be a part of their lives once again. Children need both parents in their lives. Divorce is not war, there are no winners. And the ones who lose are the children.

George Brandt - I support Bill 129!
G.A. Brandt

This bill is not about Father's Rights, or Mother's Rights, or Parental Rights. This bill is about Children's Rights – the most sacrosanct of all Human Rights. Each of us only gets one childhood – and in many ways, it determines so many outcomes for the rest of our lives.

Thirty or forty years ago, as we all know, divorce was a statistical anomaly in our society. Two parent households were the norm, and in the rare cases when a married couple with children divorced, a divorce decree could not be issued in most states until one of the spouses was determined to be at fault for the failure of the marriage. Framed in that light of guilt versus innocence and villain versus victim, it naturally followed that child custody should be awarded to the innocent party, and denied to the guilty. After all, if one had been convicted of the crime of being a bad spouse, it stood to reason that they could hardly be trusted as a responsible parent. For all these years, this model of guilt versus innocence and winner take all has come to be viewed as the normal solution for an otherwise abnormal situation.

Today, however, we live in a society where marriages can be unilaterally dissolved at the whim of one spouse and against the wishes of the other, and divorce is commonplace, to say the least. As a result, it is estimated that fifty percent of all children attending grade school do not live under the same roof as both parents. Welcome to the new normal.

If it doesn't already seem staggeringly obvious to you that every child deserves to have access to both of their parents, and enjoy their companionship, their instruction, their comfort, and the unconditional, sacrificial love that only a parent can offer, I don't believe I possess the powers of persuasion that would be required to help change your point of view. And I certainly didn't come here to lecture anyone.

~~Instead, I want to describe to you what happened to me when my children were alienated toward me – at first, when I lived within a mile of their other parent, and then later, when she eventually relocated them 1200 miles away.~~

~~What strikes me the most, as I look back on my situation during that time, is the utter lack of awareness of PAS that I discovered among counselors and therapists I met with.~~

When my divorce decree was issued, people marveled at the fact that I had been awarded 50/50 joint custody. Could a man really be entrusted with caring for his children, to the extent that he would cook them healthy meals, read to them, supervise their studies, and wash their laundry? It seemed hard for so many to grasp that I was not only willing to do all this, but I was fully capable as well. To many people, this did not seem “normal.” I encountered a strong bias from many people, including my ex-spouse’s family, that children belong with their mother on a day to day basis – especially girls, as was the case with my two daughters.

So let me make something perfectly clear. I was a fully engaged, involved, and loving father, from day one. I videotaped both of my daughter’s births, and held them in my arms within minutes of their arrivals. I changed their diapers, and fed them bottled breast milk that their mother prepared on the days that she had to leave the house. I sang to them, and stayed up with them many nights to soothe their colic. As they grew older, I dropped them off and picked them up from school. In short, I was always there for them. Since their mother traveled as much as I did for work during the two years prior to our divorce, we were already in the habit of tag-teaming the kids. I had them to myself during many weekdays, and it was by demonstrating this that I managed to be awarded joint custody.

I want to make something else clear as well. It was never my goal to win sole custody of my children. I have had several opportunities to do just that, but I know that it would have destroyed my girls to be taken from their mom. I also know that I can never be a mom to them. I can only be a dad, and dads offer something different for their kids that can't be replaced by moms either. Every child deserves both of their parents in their lives.

When you limit the time a child can spend with one parent versus the other, it will eventually diminish the respect that the child has for that parent. It will also create the question in their mind – why does my mom/dad not love me enough to spend more time with me?

There are those here today who will call this a cookie cutter decision. That is hardly the case. Instead, this is a default position that moves us away from a judgement of guilt vs innocence. It assumes that when a parent desires to be fully engaged in their child's life, it is with the best of intentions, based on the hard-wired parenting instincts that are embued in us by our creator. There will be some exceptions, obviously, but let's not calibrate the system according to these lowest denominators. When faced with the question of someone's motives, the perfect litmus test is this: does that parent fully desire for the other parent to be equally engaged in their child's life? If not, why? We can't allow one parent's bias to overrule the other fit parent, because it is a given that divorced couples will disagree over basic matters that have nothing to do with the physical safety and overall wellbeing of the child. In my case, my spouse felt that I was not a fit parent for my children for two simple reasons. I "taught" them that flatulence is amusing, and I took them to church on Sundays. After my ex-wife divorced me, she wanted nothing to do with Christianity, and she both he and her family made every effort to disillusion my children in their faith, as if I was teaching them that the Easter Bunny is real.

For the first two years, things went smoothly

✓ When I lost hope of ever having communication and contact with my children, much less a close and loving relationship with them, my kids nearly lost their dad. In short, I gave up, because my life no longer held any meaning when I could no longer be in theirs.

✓ The anxiety I felt was overwhelming and unbearable – particularly on weekends, and acutely so on Sunday evenings, when I typically made large family dinners, both before and during the first two years after the divorce.

✓ In the years since, my experience as an alienated parent has affected every aspect of my life. It nearly destroyed my self esteem and confidence, because after all – who can love me if my own children can't? The constant fear of rejection has sabotaged many of my closest relationships, and made it difficult to become intimately close with anyone – in spite of very sincere attempts to find that closeness and intimacy once again.

So, coming back around to the rights of the child and what is best for their growth, development, and security – both physical, emotional, and financial, every child deserves to be protected by

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both of their parents, and that means that both of their parents should be protected as well.



Here is a news flash for everyone to consider. When a loving parent repeatedly demonstrates their willingness, eagerness, and earnest desire to be engaged and involved in their children's lives, it typically means that they are worthy of doing so, and should at least be given the opportunity to prove their worthiness of parents. A presumption of innocence should rule the day, and they should not be treated with suspicion on the basis of hearsay or unsubstantiated accusations of being unfit parents.



I know what it felt like to have 50/50 custody during the first two years following my divorce. I saw how well adjusted my children were, in spite of their initial qualms over seeing their parents split up. I also saw the marked difference in their attitudes, toward me, and toward themselves, and toward life in general when they began to spend less and less time with me. They stopped viewing me as an authority figure in their lives, and soon I had little say over anything that a father would usually be allowed to decide for his children. **Limiting the time that a child can spend with their parent is the first step toward alienating that child from that parent.**

Since the early days of my divorce, I have had to worry about the threat of relocation.

My kids were obviously clued in toward their mother's intentions of taking them from me, because my oldest daughter slipped me a note on her way out the door that read...

A week later, I got a call from the nurse's office, informing me that my youngest daughter was upset to the point of being hysterical.

Generally, when a paren expresses an interest, willingness, and devotion to staying involved in their kids' lives, it means that they are wired with the parenting instincts that have been embued in them by their creator. It is easy enough to identify those bad parents who make a show of this for their own ulterior motives. The acid test is this: a parent who genuinely loves their child and wants the best for them will want them to have a loving relationship with the other parent, regardless of their personal feelings toward their ex spouse, or their disagreements that drove them apare – unless they know that inividvual will pose a threat to the child in some way.

Story of Brad Queen (consistent of Dicky Lee busing nurse) and Michele Haas

- Two Fathers trying to keep the mother of their children sober during parenting time and to get more parenting time themselves

① The mother has been described by the most recent judge as a "severe alcoholic"

- She has a 20-year history of alcohol abuse
- drunk driving and domestic violence
- She has used a ~~friend~~ friend who is disabled due to an even longer history of binge drinking as a free child care provider

YET: She has 5 nights a week custody with

Brad Queen's 3.5 year old daughter Alice
and 4 nights custody with Michael
Haas's 3-year old son Cooper

② By contrast, the fathers are stable in their careers, residences, and have no criminal records

③ Fathers have been forced to pay all legal costs and monitoring costs to keep their children safe

④ The moral hazard remains: that when the mother engages in alcohol abuse and domestic violence, the fathers must pay for a lack of justice. The court and social services fail the kids.