

To: Kansas House of Representatives Judiciary Committee
From: Vicky A Kaaz
Re: Proponent of SB 157
Date: March 9th, 2020

Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

I am respectfully asking for your support of Shared Parenting in our state. I believe this SB 157 seeks to recognize, strengthen and preserve the bond between children and their parents to the greatest extent possible, while supporting and recognizing the various factors that can be considered when determining the best interest of children.

My professional career and volunteer activities have allowed me the opportunity to serve our most vulnerable and economically disadvantaged populations. I was the Vocational Director at Riverside Resources serving individuals with developmental delays for five years. I was the Executive Director of the United Way of Leavenworth County for four years and was employed for 19 years as the Community Relations/Prevention Services and Education Director of the Guidance Center, the CMHC serving Atchison, Jefferson and Leavenworth Counties. While at TGC, I also served as the interim program manager of their youth psychosocial program. In 2018, I was elected to the Leavenworth Board of County Commissioners.

My past volunteer activities include volunteering for the Alliance Against Family Violence (our local domestic violence shelter). I assisted women with completing the paperwork for PFAs and wrote grants to support their mission. I served as a board member and chair of Big Brothers and Sisters of LVCO, and served as the vice chair of the Kansas Advisory Group on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. I have also served as the chair for the LVOC Multidisciplinary Child Protection Team, the vice chair of the 1st Judicial CASA Association, which oversees a CINC program, a Supervised Visit and Exchange Program and a Child Advocacy Center. I am also the past chair of the Leavenworth County Suicide Prevention Coalition, a member of the Leavenworth County Child Abuse Prevention Council and Live Well LVCO.

I share my work and volunteer history with you to demonstrate my personal commitment and dedication to improving the lives of children and families. And to assure you that as a child advocate, I would never support any legislation that would be detrimental to the best interest of children.

My experiences while working in human services field have taught me that children thrive when they feel loved, supported and valued, especially by both of their parents.

Although parents (mostly fathers) are negatively affected by inadequate access to their children, it is the children who ultimately experience the most negative consequences when denied an ongoing and equitable relationship with both parents. Unless there is evidence that equal or nearly equal parenting time is not in the child's best interest, I believe every child should have unencumbered access to both parents.

I am the grandmother of 3 children who have lost their traditional family to divorce. Like many children born today, prior to divorce, their parents shared equally the responsibility of their care on a daily basis.

My daughter divorced when my oldest grandson was three years old. She and his father could have been poster parents for sharing the responsibility of raising their son. He called two places home and there was never a question that he needed equal access to both parents. Nineteen years later, he is a well adjusted young man, preparing for his final year of college.

Never in our wildest dreams did we imagine that after 10 years of marriage, our son would find himself fighting for the right to have time with his two young children, during and extremely high conflict divorce.

Although factors ultimately resulted in my son having residential custody of the children, he recognizes the importance of their right to spend as much time as possible with their mother. Over time what began as a mother with supervised parenting time for a year to 80/20 parenting time has evolved into a 60/40 arrangement. The 60/40 was accomplished without court involvement. The children are thriving and express no objections to having two places to call home.

I realize that there are times when shared parenting is not in the best interest of a child, but strongly believe that in the majority of cases it is.

I sincerely hope that you will vote to allow this Bill to pass out of committee and to a full vote of the Kansas House of Representatives.

Respectfully,

**Vicky A Kaaz
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