

As President of the American Coalition for Fathers & Children, I appreciate your being here today to learn more about shared parenting. I am a Professor of Women's Studies at Wake Forest University. My area of expertise is adolescent psychology and father-daughter relationships. I have been writing, teaching and doing research on adolescents and fathers and daughters for 35 years. My book on adolescent psychology was used in universities throughout our country for more than 10 years. And my book on father-daughter relationships – which largely focuses on research about divorced fathers – has been acclaimed by the leading psychologists in our country as the best book on the topic. I'm sharing this information with you so that you can be confident that the information I give you today is up to date and comes from the leading researchers in our country – not from someone focused on one or two small studies conducted years ago. I would also like to add that I received an award from the American Bar Association in 1998 for the internship program that I created at Wake Forest University for pre-law students who do legal work on behalf of victims of domestic violence.

There is no question that this bill stirs up a lot of emotion. The bill also stirs up a lot of fear and stereotyping. My job as a researcher and educator is to remove the emotion from decision making and focus on the facts. These facts are the product of intense research by objective academics. For researchers one study is not enough to make recommendations to law makers – and using data gathered 10 or 15 years ago is not enough to make recommendations to law makers.

So what are those fears – Let's look at them.

One fear is that a shared parenting bill will force parents who don't get along well to share parenting together against their will:

And here is the fact: 85-90% of parents are able to agree on how to share parenting plan. This bill will encourage them to share time as equally as possible.

Fact: Only 10-15% of parents get along so poorly that they can't agree on how to share parenting. This bill will offer relief to this minority. And to the judges who are involved by guaranteeing that children have adequate time with both parents.

A second fear is that **all** parents will be forced against their will into 50/50 parenting time. This is the cookie cutter fear –

Fact: This bill specifically states that all parents are free to decide for themselves how much time each will spend with their kids. This bill does not say that a 50/50 plan will be forced on all parents.

A third fear is that this bill will increase child abuse or spousal abuse.

Fact: Mothers or fathers who have been found guilty of physically abusing their spouse or their children will not be given parenting rights.

And a fourth fear is that parents will agree to share the parenting, but eventually the kids will end up living mainly with their mother. To my knowledge, there is only one research study in which this happened - a small study done 37 years ago with only 50 parents from one county in northern California – many of whom had serious psychological problems before their divorce.

A fifth fear is that the bill will make things worse for kids financially because their fathers will pay less child support.

Fact: Fathers who are allowed to share parenting pay more of their child support and spend more money on things like clothes and **college educations** than dads who only get to be with their kids 6 or 7 days a month. Shared parenting is good for kids financially.

Now that we have dealt with the fears and myths, let's deal with the facts. Again, everything I am about to tell you is based research collected from multiple researchers within the past 5 years. No fact is based on a single study. That's important for you to remember.

Fact: 40% of our children are being deprived of the lifelong benefits of shared parenting because they are growing up in homes without their fathers. 40%. Kids who get too little or no fathering suffer lifelong problems. These problems include higher rates of physical abuse by their mothers or her boyfriends, higher rates of delinquency, aggression, pregnancy, quitting school, drug and alcohol abuse, depression, suicide, and eating disorders. Children whose fathers do not share the parenting are also more likely **to be child abusers and to be involved in domestic violence when they become adults.**

Fact: Shared parenting has greater benefits for children than how much money each parent provides. Having 2 lower income parents who share parenting is better for kids than having only one high income parent raising that child –

Fact: The vast majority of children repeatedly tell us that they want more shared parenting. The greatest single complaint of kids from divorced homes is that they did not get enough time living with their fathers. Kids say that the hassle of living in two homes is worth it because living with their fathers was so important to them.

Fact : The gift of shared parenting is one that the overwhelmingly majority of divorced fathers want to give their children. Even though dad usually ends up spending **more money** on his kids when they live with him more of the time, divorced dads want more shared parenting time.

Fact - Shared parenting is just as crucial for infants and young kids as it is for older children. Our newest research shows that infants and children under the age of five should not be separated from either parent from more than a few days – and that spending nights in both parents homes is essential for healthy bonding with each parent. It is disruptive for young children to be deprived of contact with a parent for more than a few days.

So in the end you are faced with choosing between emotion and fact, fear and reality. Ultimately you are faced with doing what's best for kids. This shared parenting bill provides the means to do that.