



## THE SHARED PARENTING COUNCIL OF CONNECTICUT

Testimony before the Judiciary Committee, April 5, 2013  
In favor of HB 6685 establishing the presumption of shared parenting  
And in favor of HB 1155 and HB 6688 correcting some of the sexist language in the statutes

My name is John M Clapp, Chair of the Shared Parenting Council of Connecticut, Inc. The Mission of the Shared Parenting Council of Connecticut is to work for change in the legislative and judicial systems of Connecticut to improve outcomes for children in contested custody cases. To this end, we have joined forces with the National Parents Organization (NPO) to encourage shared parenting.

I am in favor of HB 6685 because it promotes the importance of shared parenting.

The 2002 governor's Commission on Divorce, Custody and Children recognized the importance of continuing involvement by both parents in a child's life. The Commission identified the continuing involvement of both parents as one of the five critical system challenges affecting outcomes for children. It reviewed the overwhelming evidence that children with an absent parent have lower grades, higher delinquency, higher school dropout rates and higher risk of incarceration.

As a result of the Commission's recommendations Sec. 46b-56 of the Connecticut Statutes now states that custody decisions should "provide the child with the active and consistent involvement of both parents commensurate with their abilities and interests." However, Sec. 46b-56 still fosters litigation and conflict with its ambiguous language. The law must insist on **the critical and primary role of shared parenting.**

Unfortunately, as the process is currently structured, it too often results in the unnecessary elimination of completely fit parents from an active role in their child's life. This leads directly to poor outcomes for the children. Even one case like this would be too many, but unfortunately there are many cases where Connecticut children are disadvantaged, often because they are caught between warring parents and their lawyers pursuing money and control through litigation.

This costly and destructive litigation must be discouraged by the presumption of substantially equal parenting time. To accomplish the goal of reducing litigation, you should **amend HB 6685 to state that, at the time of separation, before any court involvement, there is a presumption of substantially equal parenting time and responsibility.** This will shift the burden of proof appropriately in favor of the right that children have to active involvement by both parents, and discourage the parent who seek control through litigation.

I am in favor of HB6685 because it says that the State of Connecticut will favor the parent who encourages active involvement by the other parent. I.e., it makes a statement against destructive litigation and attempts to use the judicial system to gain control. By enacting HB6685, the State can improve the lives of many children.

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