

Alex Knoll

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To: Oregon Senate Committee on Judiciary

Thank you to Chair Prozanski and the Committee for having this hearing and allowing this testimony. My name is Alex Knoll and I am a father, a brother, a son, a union electrician, and I am also a dreamer and a friend to anyone who has also been affected by painful divorce and custody issues across this country.

Senate Bill 318 is an important step in the right direction that I believe Oregon, along with a growing number of states, must take, and so I speak in support of this bill.

Many dreams come along with marriage. Especially when children are involved. When marriages end, the dreams of the children should not end with them. When I was married, my dreams were built upon the ideals I grew up with - literally, as I married my childhood sweetheart in 2014. Some wonderful things came from that marriage. I loved the time I spent with my stepkids and I miss them. I loved when everyone was together as a family. I especially adore the way my first natural born child thrived when the family was all together. I believe any child who is raised in an intact home is well-adjusted and well-suited to succeed in life, for I have seen the results. That is in the past now, as the marriage dissolved into a high-conflict divorce. I have come to accept that the best I can. But I tell you this with the utmost conviction and a dose of bittersweetness - Kids. Need. Both. Parents. There was one day after I separated from my now ex-wife when my ex-wife got down to my level to chat while our child played, and I recognized the happiest expression on our child's face that I had seen in many months. It dawned on me that our daughter was thriving, reveling in the moment when her parents were able to have a conversation not polluted by rancor or overrun with bitterness. It was at that moment I realized it is absolutely true what they say - children think of themselves as half-Mom, and half-Dad. Our daughter's mind was made complete and her heart was truly happy once again, if only for a few minutes.

I have also learned quite a few things about divorce that are very upsetting. I have learned that some people just love to fight and there don't seem to be a lot of countermeasures for bad behavior in family court. I have learned that a person in the Oregon court system can very easily obtain a restraining order with minimal effort - you don't even have to tell the truth. I have learned the system that is meant to keep people safe can be used to do exactly the opposite. I have learned that if you believe you will get a fair deal because you are a good person and want what's fair for everyone, you are most likely being unrealistic with your dreams. I have learned that professionals won't side with you simply because you are the more honest party, and that professionals most likely see what you see during conflicts but they cannot or choose not to act on the problems you accurately identify. I have learned that family court doesn't seem well-equipped to deal with high-conflict personalities as the squeakiest wheel gets the most attention. I have learned that I am not the only one out there who has suffered a great many traumas that come with high-conflict divorces. I have learned that in some ways, I have it easy compared to some. I have learned that there is a growing movement that will not stop hoisting

the flag for equality every time the movement suffers a setback. Most importantly, I have learned every day since my child was born that I will fight for what is best for her with whatever power I have, because she deserves it. And I will stand up for what is right for her, regardless of the combative, competitive nature that divorces can too easily become. I wish it didn't have to be a fight and I really try hard not to engage in conflicts. But my daughter needs her father and I need and that is also true for her relationship with her mother - equally so. Let's not forget studies are beginning to show how beneficial 50/50 is for kids compared to other parenting arrangements.

I just want to start to close with a few questions for us to consider when contemplating whether to push for adoption of this bill. Since the advent of no-fault divorce so many years ago, do we feel like we can confidently say the divorce process is not being used to get back at a former spouse? Do we have a real definition for what is in the "best interest of the child"? Do we know that assigning all custody, care, and control powers to one parent helps the other parent maintain an equal role in their child's life for the benefit of the child? Do we know for certain that adopting a system that robs parents and grandparents of the ability to contribute in the ways most appropriate for the child is in the best interests of the child? And finally, is the current system that is in place for custody rulings (virtually the default system no matter how terrific a parent you are) an accurate reflection of what our forefathers had in mind when they wrote the US Constitution? I believe you all can agree that answer to these questions is "No".

I cannot attend the committee hearing on March 6 as I need to work during the times the legislature meets and can't afford time away from work. I recently moved out of state as of 4 days ago, as I need to find a more affordable living arrangement so I can make support payments. However, jurisdiction for my case remains in Oregon and I'll try to make the most of it.

Senate Bill 318 would re-establish the equality parents deserve in the eyes of the law. At the end of the day, it makes more sense to establish the precedent that the court needs to be given proof that the parents are NOT equal for those seeking primary custody, as opposed to being given "proof" that one parent is more fit than the other. Kids need consistency and structure. Kids need both parents. The science is showing it. It's time to commit to real change for the benefit of our offspring.