

Good afternoon, Senator Hansell and others.

I have been made aware that SB 318 would change the current law regarding parenting plans for Oregon parents. As a retired custody and divorce mediator, I would like to state the following:

Research in the field of child development strongly and unequivocally states that parenting plans should be customized to fit the unique needs of each child; also, abundant evidence shows that the first three years of life are critical for child development and decisions should be carefully considered for this age group. I was told that the change to current law would provide a legal presumption that parenting time should be equal between parents. My years of experience working with parents have shown me that each situation is unique and deserves to be managed by the parents themselves, if at all possible, without statutory suggestion of something that perhaps both parents would agree does not work best in that family's particular circumstances.

I found over and over during my career as a custody mediator that parents who are given the opportunity to work together - sometimes, but not always - with the help of child development specialists and mediators - will always choose what works best for THEIR OWN CHILDREN. I do know that currently the 'best interest of the child' ALONE, NOT a legal presumption, is what judges and other Oregon professionals recognize as the way to make decisions regarding parenting time.

Please consider carefully before changing a law that, right now, works for each individual family and gives parents the opportunity to CHOOSE THEMSELVES what will be best for THEIR children, rather than having statutes presuming that one-size-fits-all thrust upon them. The best interests of each individual child, rather than any kind of cookie-cutter legalese, should be what parents, themselves, use to make decisions for their families. I strongly encourage leaving the current statute as it is and allowing PARENTS, THEMSELVES, the opportunity to make decisions for their precious children!

Thank you for your time.

Respectfully,
Joan Howard
Milton-Freewater, Oregon