

I have practiced family law in Oregon for over 20 years. During that time, I have represented hundreds of parents in contested matters regarding parenting time for teens. Requiring parents to obtain a teen's consent in order to have parenting time with the child is an incredibly bad idea.

Divorce is generally a highly emotional and fraught experience. Even parents with the best of intentions want the children on their "team" to deflect the rejection and disappointment the parent feels over the loss of family. This proposal is ripe for one parent to undermine the other's parental authority, a parent to give up property or support in exchange for the other parent's assistance in obtaining the child's consent to the parenting plan, or a parent to influence a child to reject contact with the other parent. The result is the child's loss of a valuable relationship with both parents.

What happens if a child does not consent to contact with the disfavored parent, but later changes her mind? What recourse does the child, who is not a party to the divorce, have in bringing a new action before the court to modify the parenting plan? Can the custodial parent effectively bar all contact between the child and the formerly disfavored parent by refusing to file a parenting time modification at the child's request? How many hearings must the court conduct each time the child plays one parent against the other by demanding a new parenting plan? Who will pay for the child's attorney? Who presents the parenting plan to the heartbroken child and asks her to choose between her parents by selecting or rejecting a parenting plan? Why are children of divorced parents permitted to choose to not have contact with a disfavored parent but not children of married parents? Is the next step to allow children to choose to live with non-family members at their parents' expense?

Children should not be in the position of defending their relationship with either parent to anyone. All the literature tells us that children should not be placed in the middle of their parents' divorce, but that is precisely the effect this bill will have.

Sincerely,
Sara Angeletti