

My name is Arlo Ryan-Keohane and I reside in Oak Grove, near Portland. I speak to you as a parent (newly a grandparent, as well), now having spent more than half my life as a father. Additionally, I have more than 2 decades of experience with family law courts in Oregon. This gives me a relatively extensive understanding of both being a parent and of how a parent can be treated by the Oregon legal system. I do not have a law degree, only one based in psychology; however, I know that laws work how people make them work rather than how those laws are intended. One central point I hope you can agree with is that parenting is the single largest undertaking, and most important contribution to society, that most people make—for better or worse. I will admit that I think we are discussing cosmetic changes when the system requires an overhaul. Regardless, I am grateful that this important topic is being discussed.

I adamantly oppose HB 2959, as it places the child in the position of decision-maker rather than advisor. Typical 14 year olds in our current culture are not prepared for the responsibility of a parenting plan. I do believe children should be involved to the extent of their capacity, which does not include a veto of what adults have decided. That is what we would be asking the child: to not be in a bad mood, not have a grudge against a parent, or not hold out for a “better deal” if they don’t completely like the parenting agreement as it stands in that moment before the judge. Given what has been learned about brain development in recent years, I submit that it is too much to ask of a minor.

I believe the drafters of this bill are wishing to express a noble sentiment, which is often referenced throughout the family court system: consider what is best for the child. Any plan which a judge would sign has that consideration, as all parties to the process have that mantra drilled into them. There are many other areas which require attention, most especially funding to education (for parent and child), which would have much greater impacts on children’s welfare.