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Written Testimony to the Kansas State Senate Judiciary Committee

Kansas State Capitol Building, Room 346-S
Topeka, KS 66612

SUPPORT SB 157

Dear Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

Thank you for your time and interest in this most important issue for the children of Kansas.

Little did I know eight years ago when I became a parent the struggles that would be ahead for me. Naively, I believed the family courts of Kansas treated both parents equally. After all, it seems only reasonable everyone started on a level playing field. Each child is born with two parents, why shouldn't they be equally involved in the child's life if both parents are fit, willing, and able to do the job. It literally never occurred to me that was not the case here in Kansas before I began the process of fighting to be a father to my son.

As I would soon find out, it was anything but. I would give every dime that I had ever made to a legal process design to withhold my God-given parenting rights. We all know these words about certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. I can think of no more important rights and obligations than those of being a parent. And in that very same document, it talks about how we're all supposed to be treated equally. Now, in "real life" we know things like that haven't been happening correctly in the country since the first day. But we've worked hard to educate people and bring about change in society to benefit all based on these words from our founders. This is one more of those long past due changes that need to happen.

Generations of children are growing up without one of their parents in their lives and we can only imagine the impacts long-term at this point. From my perspective, the state should be there to actively

encourage both parents to be involved with their children. The current system does the exact opposite. Pitting parents against each other in a winner take all system. And effectively removing one parent from the parent/child relationship. I've never experienced anything more adversarial in my life.

I'm not sure what to expect from the opposition this year but I can imagine it will be more fear mongering the same as we saw with the bill proposed last year. I can't help but wonder what agenda these people have, wanting to keep good parents away from their children. No one wants abusers of any sort to be near children. That's why we have the factors judges use now for that very situation. We're just asking for both parents to be treated equally and fairly so that children aren't missing out on what's most important for building a relationship. Time.

What does children the most good is time spent with them. You can't have quality time without quantity time. It's during those moments together that quality time happens. I think parenting is one of the most important jobs on the planet. Imagine your jobs as Senators, already highly demanding of your time and energy. But now you'll be limited to do your job every other weekend, and Wednesday evenings for 2.5hrs. I can just about guarantee how little would be accomplished with such a schedule. Now, apply it to a child. Your child, your grandchild. You know how important this job of yours is but you know there is no way you'll be able to be an effective leader and teacher for them over the coming years. The best you can hope for is to build a relationship that lasts into adulthood to try to make up for lost time. Well, that sand has already flowed through the hourglass. It's not coming back. We can't fix the past but we can change the future by righting the wrongs of yesterday for today and tomorrow.

I hope you'll join me in supporting SB 157 and empowering parents and children all across our state to have better relationships. Those relationships are built with time, time also spent with siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins our kids so dearly need.

Respectfully,

Ryan O'Neal