

Currently the state of Maryland houses 11 military installations with U.S. Marines, Army, Navy, Air Force, and Coast Guard personnel. Maryland is home to over 34, 000 active duty servicemembers and reservists. Also, the state houses about 362, 000 Veterans, mostly disabled.

As part of that population many contribute to the 1.2 million deployed servicemembers (Statistica, 2021). As a Marine Corps Veteran and military spouse of a retired 22-year United States Air Force servicemember, I speak on behalf of Servicemembers and Veterans for Children's Rights aka Heroes for Children's Rights and I oppose this bill as certain language will impact servicemembers and veteran's service related trauma after returning home from deployment.

"Of the 671,809 military members married at the start of 2020, 2.8%, or 18,494, got divorced, compared to the 3.1% who divorced over 2019, according to Defense Department personnel data released to Military.com."

Because a servicemember may be gone months and maybe years at a time, the separation between the parent and child relationship impacts the family dynamic.

"The parental alienation dynamic is sometimes more acute in the military as many couples going through a high conflict divorce come from different states and even different countries.

Further exacerbating the problem are deployments and reassignments that separate parents from their children."

Conzachi, Michael (2023). Our Hero Project – **"Parental Alienation in the U.S. Military"**

In 2022, A peer reviewed study that was published in the APA journal Developmental Psychology, titled, Developmental Psychology and the Scientific Status of Parental Alienation identified 166 peer reviewed studies about PA that were published through December 2020 in ten languages. "The results confirmed that the current state of parental alienation scholarship meets three criteria of a maturing field of scientific inquiry: an expanding literature, a shift toward quantitative studies, and a growing body of research that tests theory-generated hypotheses".

The study also concluded that "it is no longer tenable to dismiss the field as lacking in scientific status."

Since there are decades of science based research on parental alienation, which I can provide, I ask that this bill be amended to not retraumatize our military servicemembers. Recently, the AFCC Association of Family and Conciliation Courts and NCJFCJ (National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges) issued a JOINT STATEMENT ON PARENT-CHILD CONTACT PROBLEMS in 2022, which states that parental alienation is a factor that should be taken into consideration in custody decisions. (See bullet #4 of statement). I can also provide this.

If the national organization of judges and legal professionals are putting this information out for the public, shouldn't this be an alert for a bill to disqualify what could impact so many.

As part of my testimony,

- I kindly ask that you delete page 4 lines 21-24 which perpetuate the misrepresentation that the parental alienation theory presumes that contact refusal is due to alienation and that abuse allegations are false.
- I also ask that you delete page 4 lines 33-34 and page 5 line 1.
- We agree with the MD Psychological Association's recommendations to insert the following:
"AN INDIVIDUAL MUST COMPLETE THE APPROPRIATE TRAINING DEVELOPED BY THE JUDICIARY IN CONSULTATION WITH DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND CHILD ABUSE ORGANIZATIONS, THE MARYLAND BAR ASSOCIATION, AND REPRESENTATIVES FROM EACH OF THE LICENSED MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS."

Thank you for your time and thank you for your service.

Claudia Ovalles

Semper Fidelis