

My name is Hera McLeod. I am writing in support of Senate Bill 57 (Family Law – Child Custody and Visitation). A little over a year ago, I gave my verbal testimony to the working group on Child Custody Reform. I told them about my son Prince who was murdered in 2012, at only 15-months old, after a judge granted his father unsupervised visitation access.

I am supportive of this bill because I think that this type of reform can save children like my son. Specifically, when determining the best interest of the child, the court shall consider each part is able to ensure the physical safety of that child. In that consideration, it is important to factor in evidence of domestic violence, child abuse, or child neglect.

In the fifteen months that I fought in the Montgomery County, MD family court to protect my son, I brought documentation and oral testimony from several people (including police officers, former romantic partners, and the grandparent of my ex's older child). These witnesses testified to numerous occasions where my son's father had both physically and emotionally abused the women and children in his life. In addition to this chilling testimony, a Virginia police officer crossed state lines to testify that my son's father was the sole suspect in two previous murders, one being the mother of his older son.

My son died because the law didn't consider evidence related to domestic violence and child abuse in his father's past. While you might look at my case and assume that it is an outlier because my toddler ended up being brutally suffocated by his father, I would argue that there are many cases that damage children where overwhelming evidence from a parent's previous behavior isn't considered.

Right before the judge sentenced my son to death, he told me that my son would need to come home with cigarette burns or some other horrible physical sign of abuse for the court to issue supervised visitation. On October 21, 2012, my son came home to me in a body bag. Please consider passing this bill so that the children who come next won't have to suffer the same fate as my son.

Sincerely,

Hera A. McLeod