



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 1165

Family Law - Child Custody and Visitation - Visitation Reevaluations and Remedies

TO: Hon. Luke Clippinger, Chair, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee

FROM: Zachary Alberts, Director of Advocacy

The Center for Urban Families (CFUF), a West Baltimore workforce and family-strengthening community-based organization, advocates for legislative initiatives that strengthen urban communities by helping fathers and families achieve stability and economic success.

We are pleased to submit written testimony for HB 1165, with amendments. The overall purpose of the bill is an important one. We know that too often non-custodial parents are denied their legal right to visitation with their children due to a poor relationship with the custodial parent. When the denials of visitation are retributive or done to punish, the state should move quickly to enforce the legal visitation agreement. The court sets the child(ren)'s well-being as the paramount concern in establishing custody and visitation orders. Decades of research show significant improvements in child development when both parents are involved in their children's lives. During our fatherhood program, we frequently deal with fathers who are upset because their ex-partner is denying them their legally owed visitation rights and the courts are so backed up there is nothing they can do about it.

While CFUF does support the goals of this bill, we are concerned by the sanctions included in the current draft. We believe that such sanctions are counterproductive to the long-term relationship between parents and will ultimately harm the children. When reasonable, the courts should expedite hearings and ensure both parents are able to spend invaluable time with their children.

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