

Written Testimony in Support of SB 0744

Criminal Law- Interference of Custody Orders- Penalties

Sponsor: Senator Michael McKay

Submitted by: Christina Reillo

Chair, Vice Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Christina Reillo. I am a Baltimore County resident and state of Maryland employee with joint legal and physical custody of my four children.

I come before you today humbly requesting your support as a voice for the socioeconomically disadvantaged, myself included, who are seeking much-needed and long-overdue legislative reform.

When my ex-husband violated our court order for over a year- by withholding my children during my scheduled parenting time and excluding me from important decisions involving their healthcare and education, I had no effective means for enforcing the court's orders.

To protect my parental rights, I was forced to take out a home equity loan and spend nearly two years in family court. Most families do not have this option. While still maintain joint legal and physical custody of my four children, I am now working three jobs out of financial necessity to cover the legal fees I incurred because there was no other means to hold my ex-husband accountable and compel compliance with the court's orders as outlined in our parenting plan.

I believe most anyone would agree that the process as it currently exists, falls short of the definition of "justice"- defined as the moral principle of ensuring fair, impartial and proper treatment of individuals, typically administered through a legal system that upholds rights and assigns deserved consequences.

In co-parenting dynamics where there is a significant power imbalance, the socioeconomically disadvantaged party is truly left without recourse. In situations such as these, those of us who lack the financial means, resources and/or education are unjustly placed at a significant disadvantage to defend and protect our established court determined parental rights.

HB 942 would close enforcement gaps, discourage parental alienation and ensure access to justice so children can maintain relationships with fit parents.

I respectfully ask for your support of HB 942, and hope that my testimony has raised awareness to the disparity experienced by fit, willing and able parents who simply lack the financial means to hold their coparents accountable for violating the court's orders. Thank you for your time today.