

March 6, 2024

Sen. Kellie Warren  
Chairperson, Senate Committee on Judiciary  
Kansas State Capitol Building  
Topeka, Kansas 66612

**Written testimony of Julie Schwarz in favor of HB 2675: Enacting the Uniform Nonparent Visitation Act.**

Dear Madame Chairperson and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in favor of HB 2675: Enacting the Uniform Nonparent Visitation Act.

Five years ago, my husband died by suicide. We had two boys together. I also have two stepsons from my husband's first marriage. As with any sudden death, and particularly a death by suicide, the time immediately following his death was extremely emotional.

As their sole living parent, I recognized the gravity of many decisions that needed to be made for my boys. When appropriate, I sought professional counsel from specialists in the areas of pediatric social-emotional well-being, grief and attachment. With the help of these professionals, I made decisions for my boys, then 6 and 2, to help them heal while mitigating any additional trauma.

One such decision, after much consultation with multiple professionals, was to not allow my mother-in-law time with my boys. Due to patterns of behavior prior to my husband's death, as well as her behavior following his death, I could not trust my mother-in-law to be a safe, healthy, supportive influence in my boys' lives.

Listed below are some of the concerns that contributed to my decision. This is far from a comprehensive list.

- My mother-in-law blamed me for my husband's death and had told others that she wanted to make sure my boys knew that I killed their father. She met with law enforcement and attorneys in an attempt to convince them to charge me with murder (all accusations were unfounded and disregarded by law enforcement).
- My mother-in-law demonstrated an ongoing lack of sound judgment in regards to minor children.
  - In the weeks following their dad's death, she took my stepsons to commit a Class B Felony in Camden County, MO. She tried to blame the entire event on my youngest stepson who was 14 years-old at the time. Ultimately, she signed an affidavit of guilt and entered into a Deferred Prosecution Agreement (DPA) in March 2020.

- Prior to my husband's death, my mother-in-law gave my then 13 year-old stepson a copy of Adolf Hitler's manifesto "Mein Kampf" for a gift. Following my husband's death, she made hateful, anti-semitic fueled statements about me, my family and my boys.
- My mother-in-law had demonstrated a pattern of behaviors in an attempt to alienate my stepsons from their mother over many years. This was repeatedly addressed through the court proceedings between my husband and his ex-wife and culminated with the decision that my mother-in-law was unable to travel with my step sons without one of their parents. Since my husband's death, the pattern has continued as she has asked my stepsons to choose her over their own mother. She severed her relationship from my youngest stepson when he refused to do so and did not have any contact with him for several years. Unfortunately, my oldest stepson has not spoken to his mother, his four brothers or me in several years while continuing a relationship with his grandmother.

Two months after my husband's death, my mother-in-law filed for visitation. Thus beginning legal proceedings that have spanned over five years and throughout which time my fundamental rights as a fit parent have been ignored again and again.

My mother-in-law was quick to confirm that I was a fit parent and expressed no concerns regarding my ability to care for and raise my boys effectively. The role of a fit parent is to make decisions in their children's best interest. My rights as my boys' sole, living parent, were infringed upon when the judge approved my mother-in-law's motion to appoint a Guardian Ad Litem to represent their best interest.

Despite the fact that I, as a fit parent, had many legitimate concerns regarding the impact contact with my mother-in-law would have on my boys', my rights as a parent were not honored again when my concerns were dismissed and visitation was ordered for my boys' with their grandmother.

Though she denied it in May of 2023, my mother-in-law recently admitted to hiring private investigators to surveil my home and follow me and my boys. I shared my concerns with the reintegration therapist and my attorney and was told nothing could be done. This caused my oldest son to demonstrate hypervigilance for many months and fear to walk in our neighborhood. I have been told that my concerns don't matter.

The situation has caused much stress and subjected my boys to additional trauma. Both of them experienced significant behavioral regression correlating to the start of the court ordered reintegration therapy and visitation. They begged me to help them and try to stop these visits. I have never felt so helpless as a parent. I was being forced to put my boys in a harmful situation and was told there was nothing I could do to protect them. As a fit parent, my boys' *only* parent, my right to protect my children should have been honored.

I believe that “it takes a village” to raise kids. That “village” can consist of many different types of people. It is the responsibility of a child’s fit parent/guardian to curate a “village” of people to provide for and support. Oftentimes members of that “village” include extended family; however, shared genetics should not give one the right to be in a child’s life at the expense of their well-being and/or the well-being of their relationship with their parent(s).

For those reasons, I would advocate for the passage of this piece of legislation. Your vote to refer this legislation to the whole Senate will mean a more stable, safe, and productive family environment for the children you represent.

Thank you for allowing me to share my testimony. I am available to answer questions at the appropriate time.

Sincerely:

Julie Schwarz  
Prairie Village