

## S.B. 174: Protecting the Best Interests of Children

Across Ohio, survivors of domestic violence are navigating custody systems ill-suited to address the complexities of abuse. The law asks survivors to co-parent with the person who has harmed them and/or their child and measures how well they co-parent with their abuser. As noted family law attorney and author [Meg Groff](#) states:

*“Victims of domestic violence are the only victims who, if they have children, are forced to communicate with their assailants—weekly, daily—and judged by how nice they are about it.”*

That is why ODVN and our member programs and numerous allied professional organizations **support Senate Bill 174**, which was designed to prioritize child well-being and protect families.

### **What the Bill Does**

- **Does not create a presumption of equal parenting time.**
- **Modernizes outdated legal language** and reduces terminology that exacerbates conflict.
- Expands the “best interest of the child” factors from 13 to 24, adding new criteria that require courts to weigh any past or present history of domestic violence, coercive litigation tactics, or the safety of both the child and protective parent.
- **Strengthens child safety**, allowing courts to approve or order a restriction in parenting responsibilities if the court finds that the restriction is reasonably calculated to protect a child from physical, sexual, or emotional abuse or a parent from domestic violence.
- **Clarifies available remedies** including supervised visits, no contact, or other restrictions when parenting time would put a child or survivor at risk.
- **Elevates children’s voices**, allowing in-camera interviews with the judge, and prohibits submission of affidavits or pressure-based statements from minors.
- Allows courts to appoint both a guardian ad litem and a separate attorney for the child, clarifying roles to support both best interest and expressed wishes.
- **Prohibits courts from favoring one parent due to income, gender, or housing status.**
- **Provides remedies that help families**, including parent education and counseling to help parents meet their responsibilities.
- **Requires appeals be given calendar priority.**

More work needs to be done to improve the way Ohio’s courts handle custody matters when a parent is a survivor of abuse. We support S.B. 174 because it enhances transparency and trust in our family court system: parents and survivors will have clearer expectations about what the courts must consider, and judges will have better tools and guidance to make decisions rooted in safety, accountability, and the child’s actual needs.

S.B. 174 is a bill we can build on because it centers what matters most: safety, for children and parents. Under S.B.174, **Kids Come First**.

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More than 90 organizations support S.B. 174

### Statewide Organizations

Groundwork Ohio	Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence	Community Endeavors Foundation, Inc.
Ohio Judicial Conference	Ohio Victim Witness Association	Ohio Association of Magistrates
Ohio Chapter of the International Association of Forensic Nurses	Ohio Association of Domestic Relations Judges	American Academy of Matrimonial Attorneys—Ohio Chapter
Ohio Poverty Law Center	Buckeye Region Anti-Violence Organization (BRAVO)	Equitas Health
Ohio Domestic Violence Network	Ohio State Bar Association	Ohio Crime Victim Justice Center
Ohio NOW	National Association of Social Workers—Ohio Chapter	Ohio Network of Children's Advocacy Centers
Ohio Association of Juvenile Court Judges		

### Local and Regional Organizations

The Center for Family Safety and Healing / <i>Franklin Co.</i>	COMPASS Family & Community Services, Sojourner House / <i>Mahoning Co.</i>	Crossroads Crisis Center / <i>Allen Co.</i>
LSS CHOICES for Victims of Domestic Violence / <i>Franklin Co.</i>	Family Abuse Shelter of Miami Co. / <i>Miami Co.</i>	Bethany House / <i>Lucas Co.</i>
Advocating Opportunity / <i>Lucas and Franklin Cos.</i>	Jewish Family Service Association of Cleveland / <i>Cuyahoga Co.</i>	Shepherd's House / <i>Vinton Co.</i>
Hope & Healing Survivor Resource Center—Battered Women's Shelter & Rape Crisis Center / <i>Summit and Medina Cos.</i>	Lorain County Safe Harbor / <i>Lorain Co.</i>	Crime Victim Services / <i>Allen and Putnam Cos.</i>
Family Crisis Network—Our Home / <i>Mercer Co.</i>	New Directions / <i>Knox Co.</i>	Peace House / <i>Fayette Co.</i>
YWCA of Van Wert County / <i>Van Wert Co.</i>	Domestic Violence Project, Inc. / <i>Stark Co.</i>	YWCA Greater Cincinnati / <i>Hamilton, Clermont, Brown, and Adams Cos.</i>
Crisis Care Line / <i>Van Wert Co.</i>	YWCA Dayton / <i>Montgomery and Preble Cos.</i>	Haven House / <i>Pickaway Co.</i>
First Step / <i>Seneca and Sandusky Cos.</i>	Turning Point / <i>Marion, Delaware, Wyandot, Morrow, Crawford, and Union Cos.</i>	Violence Free Futures / <i>Greene Co.</i>
The Cocoon / <i>Wood Co.</i>	Project Woman / <i>Clark, Champaign, and Madison Cos.</i>	Asian American Community Services / <i>Franklin Co.</i>
Soteria House & New Directions of TNC / <i>Logan Co.</i>	The Woodlands/The Center for New Beginnings / <i>Licking Co.</i>	Family and Child Abuse Prevention Center—Children's Advocacy Center / <i>Lucas Co.</i>
Southern Ohio Task Force on Domestic Violence / <i>Scioto Co.</i>	Asian Services in Action / <i>Summit and Cuyahoga Cos.</i>	Ross County Coalition Against Domestic Violence / <i>Ross Co.</i>
Survivor Advocacy Outreach Program / <i>Athens, Meigs, Perry, Gallia, Hocking, Morgan, and Vinton Cos.</i>	Tri-County Help Center / <i>Monroe, Belmont and Harrison Cos.</i>	ETSS / <i>Franklin Co.</i>
Sarah's Friends, Inc. / <i>Williams Co.</i>	Transitions / <i>Muskingum Co.</i>	A.L.I.V.E. / <i>Jefferson Co.</i>
The Center for Child and Family Advocacy Inc./House of Ruth / <i>Henry and Defiance Cos.</i>	New Choices / <i>Shelby Co.</i>	Christina House / <i>Columbiana Co.</i>
SART Clinic of Northwest Ohio / <i>Fulton Co.</i>	YWCA of Northwest Ohio / <i>Lucas Co.</i>	OneEighty / <i>Wayne and Holmes Co.</i>
The Domestic Violence Shelter, Inc. / <i>Richland Co.</i>	Forbes House / <i>Lake Co.</i>	Shelter from Violence / <i>Darke Co.</i>
Women Helping Women / <i>Hamilton Co.</i>	Journey Center for Safety & Healing / <i>Cleveland</i>	Square One / <i>Gallia Co.</i>
Homesafe Inc. / <i>Ashtabula Co.</i>	Auglaize County Crisis Center, Inc. / <i>Auglaize Co.</i>	Safe Harbour Domestic Violence Shelter / <i>Erie Co.</i>
Eve / <i>Washington Co.</i>	YWCA Hamilton / <i>Butler Co.</i>	Alternatives to Violence Center / <i>Highland and Clinton Cos.</i>
WomenSafe / <i>Geauga Co.</i>	Artemis Center / <i>Montgomery Co.</i>	ASHA-Ray of Hope / <i>Franklin Co.</i>
Safe on Main / <i>Warren Co.</i>	My Sister's Place / <i>Athens Co.</i>	Rape Crisis and Domestic Violence Safe Haven / <i>Ashland Co.</i>
Someplace Safe / <i>Trumbull Co.</i>	Open Arms Domestic Violence and Rape Crisis Center / <i>Hancock Co.</i>	Alta Behavioral Healthcare / <i>Mahoning and Trumbull Cos.</i>
Safer Futures / <i>Portage Co.</i>	Ohio Guidestone / <i>Tuscarawas and Carroll Cos.</i>	Casa de Paz / <i>Hamilton Co.</i>
Alliance Area Domestic Violence Shelter / <i>Stark Co.</i>	The Lighthouse Inc. / <i>Fairfield Co.</i>	Foundations for Families / <i>Franklin Co.</i>