

Written Proponent Testimony in Support of SB157

To: House Judiciary Committee

From : Jerome Marquez

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Chairman Patton and members of the Committee,

I'm a fatherhood practitioner working in this field for about 10 years, I work and have worked with hundreds of fathers who come from different backgrounds, many of them struggle with the court system, others facing financial issues, others were alienated by the children's mother, addictions, childhood trauma, other were incarcerated, involved in domestic violence, many others were doing their best to be in their children's lives and what I have learned from the majority of them, is that they acknowledge the importance of their children and have shared they love for them, of course many fathers don't have the best skills, just like many mothers, but I have observed how much their children needs them in their lives. I have seen fathers reaching out to their children rebuilding a great relationship, and also building a civil relationship with their children's mother, yes there are many fathers who are not interested in being part of their children's lives and other fathers shouldn't be around children, but we can't generalize all fathers.

Personally, as a father I can't imagine not being around my children in their daily activities, and I strongly believe that is my right as a father like is the right of my wife to be in our children's lives. There is so much alarming evidence in our nation about the father's absence, the system has been working on helping families for many years always looking for the well-being of the child, but unfortunately the system haven't see the importance of the father because the expectations about the fathers are so low that is very easy to forget that we are important.

Many fathers suffer for not being able to see their children and if the father suffer, is obvious that the children suffer as much or more because the father and the mother are the most significant persons in the child's live. We have a fatherlessness epidemic and the consequences are catastrophic, for example, 71% of high school drop outs come from fatherless homes, 71% of teenage pregnancy, 85% of behavioral disorders, 90% of homeless and runaway children, 85% of youth in prison, 70% of men in prison and 63% of youth suicide, comes from fatherless homes, children from fatherless homes are 4 times in greater risk if poverty, they are more likely to face abuse and neglect, more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol, I know there are fathers who are physically present but emotionally absent, there are fathers who are abusive physically, emotionally, etc, but again this doesn't define fatherhood. Research shows that involved fathers can help to improve their children's overall emotional and social well-being, children are less likely to be mistreated, children can do better in school, teen boys are less likely to carry guns and deal with drugs, fathers can reduce mom's parenting stress, children have fewer behavioral problems.

For this and many other reasons I believe that fathers and mothers deserve to have equal access to their children, because that's the best interest of the children and not what the system dictates. Again, as a father I can't imagine having limited access to my children but also, I can't imagine my children have limited access to me, it's not fair. This system is not working. I encourage you to please help to fix this big problem which is the number one problem in the United States of America.

Thank you, Respectfully,

Jerome Marquez