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To whom it May Concern:

I am writing this letter in support of HB 334. This bill will address some of the unintended consequences in the domestic violence statutes. No one should be the victim of violence from a domestic partner, but the current statutes are encouraging unnecessary litigation and hurting children.

Domestic violence restraining orders are civil cases, not criminal cases so the burden of proof is minimal. This makes it much easier for someone to now use the court system as a weapon against the other parent. Frequently, people will file a restraining order before they file for divorce or custody of their children. This allows the person who makes the allegation to kick the other parent out of the home, restrict all access to the children, freeze the bank accounts and change the locks.

Once the parties are involved in the custody case any allegations of domestic violence have a tendency to severely curtail access of the parent being accused of abuse to their children. It also makes the case more litigious and hostile so that it is unlikely that the parents will be able to mediate their differences and successfully co-parent their children.

The presumption in custody cases is that the non-abuser is the better parent. Therefore, a person who can convince the court that they are victims of past domestic violence will get full custody of the children. Unfortunately, the presumption advantage has encouraged people to exaggerate and make up stories to get the other parent labeled as a perpetrator of domestic violence.

Even if the domestic violence allegation is more than ten years ago, has nothing to do with the children, does not include violence and was never previously reported to anyone the allegation is enough to immediately deny access of the other parent to the children. Children are then left confused and hurt as to why a parent they love has suddenly and without warning disappeared from their life.

The increase in domestic violence restraining order hearings and domestic violence allegations in custody cases clogs the court system with unnecessary litigation. It costs the judicial system resources better used in prosecuting criminal cases of domestic violence. It encourages custody hearings to be contentious, winner take all affairs that make it difficult for parents to put aside their differences, put the best interests of their children first and learn to co-parent their children.

HB 334 will actually protect victims of domestic violence and children in custody cases by removing the impetus for exaggerating and lying about prior arguments and disagreements. When the court system is inundated with questionable claims of domestic violence it has an impact of making domestic violence seem less serious. This hurts people who truly are victims in need of help as their cases end up delayed due to an over burdened court system.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me.

Kirsten Swanson