

NPO Celebrates the Passing of West Virginia's Shared Parenting Law

West Virginia Governor Jim Justice signs the Best Interests of Child Protection Act, prioritizing shared parenting

CHARLESTON, WEST VIRGINIA, USA, March 31, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- National Parents Organization (NPO), a nonprofit committed to transforming the norms of shared parenting nationwide, applauds West Virginia lawmakers for their bipartisan work in creating, passing, and supporting the state's first law supporting shared parenting. Governor Jim Justice signed the Best Interests of Child Protection Act into law March 30, 2022.

"NPO is thrilled that West Virginia now joins two other states, Kentucky and Arkansas, with similar laws presuming or considering 50/50 custody for children whose parents are separated or divorced," said Matt Hale, NPO board member and advocate from Kentucky. "What we're doing is important and it is truly protecting the wellbeing of children."

NPO worked with West Virginians for Shared Parenting, a grassroots effort founded and led by Jeb Pinkerton. Together, along with many volunteers, these groups were able to get this bill in front of West Virginia lawmakers. Cam Huffman, a legislative liaison volunteer for NPO, was instrumental in advocating for this law and sharing its importance based on his own shared parenting experience.

"My ex's attorney told me in a settlement conference that if I don't like the laws in West Virginia, then I should change them. That was the best advice I've ever received. So, I got to work and here we are," shared Huffman, a father of two girls. "This law has been a long time coming. A few years ago, we couldn't even get the bill to be taken up in committee in the House of Delegates and now it has passed with super majorities in both Houses this year."

According to a recent [independent study](#) commissioned by NPO, 97% of those polled in West Virginia believe that it is in the child's best interest to have as much time as possible with each parent in cases of separation or divorce. In addition, 96% of West Virginians polled expressed a commitment to vote their beliefs being "more likely to vote for a candidate who supports children spending equal or nearly equal time with each parent ...when both parents are fit and willing to be parents."

"The poll from National Parents Organization showing how popular shared parenting is in West

Virginia helped push the bill over the top," said Delegate Geoff Foster (R-Putnam) who was critical in the House passing the bill. "West Virginia modeled Senate Bill 463 after Kentucky's Shared Parenting Law but with a higher level of evidence to rebut shared parenting. Kentucky's law has proven popular and coincides with reduced domestic violence."

Senate Bill 463 was sponsored by Sen. Randy E. Smith (R-Tucker) and co-sponsored by Senators Rucker, Grady, Sypolt, Maynard, Azinger, Phillips, Takubo, Woodrun, Tarr, and Roberts. It includes several legal elements that achieve the overall standard for shared parenting laws that NPO supports including:

- Establishing collaborative parenting as a goal in allocation of custodial responsibility and decision-making;
- Creating a rebuttable presumption that equal (50-50) custodial allocation is in a child's best interest;
- Requiring specific findings and legal conclusions by the court if equal (50-50) parenting is not granted;
- Establishing criteria for diverging from equal (50-50) custodial allocation when it is sought.

This law also introduces the Friendly Parent Factor. This considers the likelihood a party will allow the child frequent, meaningful, and continuing contact with the other parent. This factor was originally introduced into law in Arizona and then also added by Kentucky in 2018. Also similar to Kentucky law, SB 463 uses the directives of shared parenting and equal time with both parents as a starting point. Then, other factors that evaluate parents' fitness and ability, as well as the wishes of the child, are considered.

"During this legislative process, NPO had the pleasure of working with many volunteers and West Virginians who are passionate about shared parenting for divorce and separated parents. The passing of this bill would not have been possible without the work of many including Jeb Pinkerton, founder of West Virginians for Shared Parenting; Cam Huffman, NPO's legislative liaison; and Chad Collins, NPO West Virginia's state chair," added Hale. "This bill helps to set the standard for legislation across the country and we hope to see momentum building in other states as we continue our mission and activism."

This new law is the goal for shared parenting bills nationwide. It is the hope of NPO that other states will follow this structure and create this type of legislation. To learn more about NPO and its legislative efforts in other states, visit www.sharedparenting.org. You can also help to support the not-for-profit organization's mission and vision by donating, fundraising, volunteering, and advocating.

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The overarching goal of National Parents Organization (NPO) is to promote shared parenting by educating parents, divorce professionals, and legislators and by reforming family courts and laws in every state. NPO focuses on advocacy and research leading to systemic reform of the family

courts.

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