

Good morning Senator Rotundo, Representative Cloutier, Representative McCabe and members of the committee.

My name is Brenda Hathaway and I support this bill.

My stepdaughter had two homes for four years. The only gift I ever saw make her cry was a necklace I gave her that said "Big Sis" and contained the names of her siblings from both households.

At age 11, her father was killed in the Lewiston mass shooting.

Gatekeeping began immediately. We went from 50/50 custody to being at the mercy of her mother's whims. The gatekeeping applied to the entirety of her father's family as well.

When I did get to talk with my stepdaughter she asked what was going to happen to us. She wanted the old schedule back. (In court, that would have been hearsay.)

I asked for advice from social workers, lawyers, doctors, other parents, therapists, anyone. Her grandmother and I were both told I had a better chance at De Facto Parental Rights than she did with Grandparents' Rights.

I filed for De Facto Parental Rights and a few days later my stepdaughter and her mother disappeared. They ghosted an entire community of people. Multiple people called DHHS, another avenue which seems to have failed. I did not have standing to be able to request a Guardian ad litem.

My stepdaughter was not allowed to say goodbye to the Hathaway family or even to her own friends. Belongings at my house—gone. Activities—gone. Support system—gone. She lost her father and then she lost her voice, she lost her rights, she lost her world.

At my hearing, I did not prove that her mother understood, acknowledged, or accepted me as a parent. It was not enough that her father did because "One parent cannot unilaterally 'cause an unconstitutional dilution of another's legal parent's rights'"

I did not try to prove her mother was unfit; that was not in my stepdaughter's best interests. I did state what her mother's actions had been. It seems to me that since I did not prove her mother was unfit it was then presumed that her mother's actions had been in her child's best interest.

The law failed. No one should be alienated from their family regardless of biological or legal connection.

My stepdaughter loves her mother, but the mental health consequences of this on my stepdaughter will be severe and long lasting. And to me it feels wholly unnecessary and heartbreaking.

I hope you will consider my story not only for passing this bill but for the wording of the bill if it's passed.

Thank you for your time and consideration.