

Kentucky becomes first US state to have Shared Parenting Day

Goshen man driving force behind landmark law, shared parenting day

By Andrew Henderson

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One year after a landmark law, Kentucky also became the first state in the United States to declare a Shared Parenting Day.



Andrew Henderson/The Oldham Era

Matt Hale, a Goshen resident, poses in his home with the Shared Parenting Day proclamation signed by Kentucky governor Matt Bevin.

The Commonwealth proclaimed April 26 as Shared Parenting Day to honor shared parenting as a way to encourage children's access to both parents.

"This day is for the entire state, for all families," Matt Hale, Kentucky's former chairman of the National Parents Organization, said.

Hale, a Goshen resident, has been working on a shared parenting law in Kentucky for the past seven years.

The law, passed in 2018 as House Bill 528, creates a legal presumption, a sort of legal starting point that equal time with both parents is in the best interest of a child.

Governor Matt Bevin held a ceremonial signing of the bill last September. It was during the ceremony, Hale said he approached Bevin with the idea of a shared parenting day and said Bevin was very receptive to the idea.

"Kentucky's children are the Commonwealth's most important asset, and shared parenting benefits our children by providing access to both parents following a divorce or separation, while also factoring in clearly defined exceptions," Bevin said in a statement.

Kentucky is the first state to have a "legal presumption" and pass a permanent custody order for shared parenting.

The law has multiple factors when deciding on joint custody, such as a child's proximity to their school or home or mental health of the parents and child.

Additionally, the law stipulates if a domestic violence order is being, or has been, entered against a parent by another parent, or child, then the presumption of joint custody will not apply.

Critics of the law, however, have said it takes away discretion from judges tasked with determining the best interests of a child.

Hale views April 26 being named Shared Parenting Day in the state as symbolic as it follows April 25, which is Parental Alienation Day in Kentucky and in countries across the world.

"Kentucky is leading the nation in fighting parental alienation," he said.

Parental alienation, according to online legal dictionary Duhaime, is a "form of emotional child abuse where a custodial parent belittles or vilifies the other parent to the child."

Alexandra Beckman, women's outreach director of Kentucky's National Parents Organization who runs the Facebook page "Parental Alienation in KY," said she's gone through parental alienation and wonders if the shared parenting law would've changed her outcome.

"If it would've been a law back then, maybe things would've gone better for me," Beckman said.

Beckman and her former husband went through a divorce several years ago that included their five children.

She said they started off with 50-50 custody, but after some time she believed her ex-husband and his mother were intentionally alienating her two sons from her.

"Basically if you're not co-parenting, you're counter parenting," she said.

The law has also caught on across the U.S. At least seven states have filed shared parenting legislation for the first time, and in 2018 more than 25 states considered similar legislation.

