



Department of Education

To: Alabama State Representatives  
From: Dr. Linda Nielsen  
Professor of Adolescent & Educational Psychology  
Wake Forest University  
Subject: Custody Bill Revision  
Date: February 13, 2013

I am writing in support of the proposed amendments to Alabama's custody laws. For the past twenty years of my forty year career, I have focused my research and my teaching on children of divorce. An essential part of that work has been to analyze the research comparing children who live with each parent 35% to 50% time to those who live almost exclusively with one parent with alternative weekend visitation time with their other parent. My articles on this research have been published in the *American Journal of Family Law*, the *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, and in numerous magazines and newsletters for State Family Law Bar Associations. I have also presented these findings at three national conferences for the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts, the nation's largest organization for professionals who work in family courts. I am frequently called upon to provide this research for legislators in the U.S. and abroad. .

I am urging you to adopt the proposed custody bill amendments, based on three key findings from almost thirty years of research:

- (1) Children who live 35% to 50% time with each parent are better off than those who live with one parent and spend varying amounts with their other parent in regard to: academic performance, drug and alcohol abuse, smoking, delinquency, stress related health problems, emotional and behavior problems, and the quality and endurance of their relationships with both parents.
- (2) These better outcomes occur *even when* their parents have high levels of ongoing verbal conflict and even when one parent is initially opposed to equal sharing.
- (3) The majority of children who have lived in these shared parenting families say the inconvenience of living in two homes outweighs the benefits. In contrast, the vast majority of children who only see one of their parents on alternative weekdays or mid week visits say they want more time living with their non-residential parent.

If you have questions about this research, please feel free to contact me. [Nielsen@wfu.edu](mailto:Nielsen@wfu.edu)

*Linda Nielsen*