

16th Legislative Assembly

**Second Session
Second Sitting
May 22 – June 19, 2008**

JUN 10, 2008

Equal Shared Parenting Rights

Mr. Ramsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I want to speak about equal shared parenting.

Statistics show that nearly 50 per cent of all marriages are ending in divorce. In some cases the consequences can be financial and emotional. However, the majority of marriage breakups involve children and the custody of those children, for which the consequences of parental alienation and the justice system can impact on the lives of those children for their entire lives.

When a marriage or relationship breaks down, the issues that led to the breakup far too often supersede what should be the primary focus of any proceeding: the welfare and the well-being of the children of the relationship. The needs of the child often get overlooked by the need to punish former partners. All too often their punishment takes the form of trying to restrict access to children. The children don't understand this. They want and need both parents in their lives.

The adversarial approach that exists under current divorce legislation can, through the awarding of sole custody to the mother, deny fathers any meaningful role in the upbringing of the child and lead to these children being brought up in what is essentially a single parent household. Statistics show that children brought up in single parent homes are more likely to come into contact with the law, abuse drugs and alcohol, and do poorly in school.

Statistics also prove that conflicts between joint custody parents diminish over time, whereas in the case of sole custody, court battles can and do rage on for years. This adversarial approach serves no one, except maybe the lawyers. The best interests of the children take a back seat, and this is just not fair.

The only role the courts should have in determining custody should be in those cases where violence or abuse has been proven against one of the parental parties and it would be in the best interests of the child to restrict access to that parent. This would reduce the number of false accusations of abuse that are often made in the heat of battle in our current adversarial process. Our children deserve to have both parents in their lives.

Currently the Member of Parliament for Saskatoon-Wanuskewin, Mr. Maurice Vellacott, has prepared an equal-shared parenting motion, M-483.25 Many Members of Parliament have signed on to second Mr. Vellacott's motion, and I hope that our MP, Mr. Dennis Bevington, will do the right thing and, for the sake of our children and their future, support that motion. Mahsi.