



MISSOURI HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WITNESS APPEARANCE FORM

BILL NUMBER: HB 2505		DATE: 2/3/2026	
COMMITTEE: Children and Families			
TESTIFYING: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> IN SUPPORT OF <input type="checkbox"/> IN OPPOSITION TO <input type="checkbox"/> FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES			
WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: ARNIE C. DIENOFF-STATE PUBLIC ADVOCATE		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: In-Person		SUBMIT DATE: 2/3/2026 1:11 AM

THE INFORMATION ON THIS FORM IS PUBLIC RECORD UNDER CHAPTER 610, RSMo.

I am in Support of this Bill making every effort possible and giving first-consideration to any available and interested Grand-Parents of any children, where both parents have been deemed incompetent to have the responsibilities' and custody of their children by a Circuit Court of Our State.



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WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: COURTNEY TEED		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 2/2/2026 4:34 PM	

THE INFORMATION ON THIS FORM IS PUBLIC RECORD UNDER CHAPTER 610, RSMo.

My name is Courtney Teed, and I respectfully submit this written testimony in support of statutory language that prioritizes kinship placement when a court determines that each parent is unfit, unsuitable, or unable to serve as custodian, or when the welfare of the child requires placement outside the parents' care.

My child has been in state custody since October 3rd. From the outset of this case, there were family members willing, able, and prepared to provide care. Despite this, kinship placement was denied and not permitted, even though no finding was made that such placement would be unsafe or contrary to my child's best interests.

Most notably, my child has a grandparent who has been a teacher for 24 years. She has dedicated her professional life to the care, education, and protection of children. Immediately upon my child's removal, she stepped forward to provide a stable home for her grandchild and began the process of becoming a licensed foster parent through the state of Kansas, demonstrating both commitment and compliance with regulatory requirements.

Despite her extensive experience, qualifications, and willingness to meet every expectation placed before her, she was not allowed to take placement of her own grandchild.

As a result, my child was placed outside of his family, separated from familiar relationships, routines, and emotional supports. For a child already experiencing the trauma of removal, this additional loss of kinship connections compounded the harm rather than mitigating it.

The statutory language before you is critically important because it ensures that family placement is given real priority, not merely theoretical consideration. It does not eliminate judicial discretion, nor does it require placement with relatives when it would be unsafe or inappropriate. Instead, it affirms that relatives—particularly grandparents—should be meaningfully considered first when it is in the child's best interest.

Kinship caregivers provide continuity, preserve identity, and reduce trauma. When children are removed from their parents, they should not also lose their entire family if safe, willing relatives are available.

I urge this committee to support this provision so that children can remain connected to their families whenever possible, and so that other families do not experience the unnecessary separation and harm

that mine has endured.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and commitment to the welfare of children and families.



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WITNESS NAME		
REGISTERED LOBBYIST:		
WITNESS NAME: MADISON EACRET		PHONE NUMBER: 314-882-1007
REPRESENTING: FOSTERADOPT CONNECT		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY: INDEPENDENCE		STATE: MO
		ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE:	SUBMIT DATE: 2/3/2026 12:00 AM
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WITNESS NAME		
INDIVIDUAL:		
WITNESS NAME: PRECIOUS JONES		PHONE NUMBER:
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY:		STATE: ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 2/1/2026 10:12 PM
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I am in full support of this bill. I am and and grandmother who loves her grandchildren immensely! I couldnt imagine my children being placed with someone else if their was ever a situation to occur and my grandchildren needed to be placed somewhere. Grandchildren are an extra treat from God to us grandparents! We love our grandbabies unconditionally! yes i fully support this bill Thank you rep for creating this bill for us grandparents!



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WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: TIMOTHY (TJ) TEED		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 2/2/2026 4:31 PM	
THE INFORMATION ON THIS FORM IS PUBLIC RECORD UNDER CHAPTER 610, RSMo.			

Chairwoman Jones, Vice Chair Peters, Representative Proudie and Members of the Committee,

My name is TJ Teed, and I am writing today to speak in support of HB 2505, specifically the provision that ensures a grandparent is given priority consideration when a child is placed with a third party, when doing so is in the best interest of the child.

HB 2505 is about stability, continuity, and minimizing trauma for children during some of the most disruptive moments of their lives. When a child cannot remain with their parents, the most protective next step is often placement with family—particularly grandparents—who already have an established bond, shared history, and a demonstrated commitment to the child’s well-being.

Our family has experienced firsthand why this clarification in the law is so necessary.

In our case, placement decisions were made despite the presence of a grandparent who was exceptionally well suited to care for our son. My mother-in-law has a strong, loving, and well-established relationship with him, built over years of consistency and trust. She is also a teacher of more than 25 years, with extensive experience supporting children academically, emotionally, and developmentally.

Additionally, our son is on the autism spectrum, which makes consistency, routine, and familiarity especially critical to his well-being. My mother-in-law understood his daily routines, communication needs, and sensory sensitivities, and had already been providing him with the structure and stability that children with autism require. This existing knowledge and relationship made her uniquely suited to serve his best interest during a time of upheaval.

She had a safe and stable home and a genuine commitment to maintaining family connections and supporting reunification. By any reasonable measure, she was a placement that aligned with our child’s best interest.

However, in our case, Children’s Services stated that no grandparent should be chosen over another, effectively treating all grandparents as interchangeable and disregarding the individual bond, qualifications, and suitability that should matter most to the child.

This approach overlooks a fundamental truth: children are not best served by neutrality for the sake of neutrality. They are best served by thoughtful, individualized decisions that prioritize emotional

security, stability, and existing relationships.

HB 2505 does not mandate placement with grandparents, nor does it remove judicial discretion. What it does is ensure that qualified grandparents are meaningfully considered, rather than sidelined by blanket policies or arbitrary reasoning. It keeps the focus where it belongs—on what is truly best for the child.

When safe, capable grandparents are available and willing, they should not be dismissed. Prioritizing grandparents when appropriate preserves family bonds, reduces trauma, and provides children with continuity during an already overwhelming time.

I respectfully urge this committee to support HB 2505 and to recognize that giving grandparents priority consideration—when it serves the child’s best interest—is not only reasonable, it is necessary.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to protecting children and strengthening families.



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WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: TIMOTHY FABER		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written		SUBMIT DATE: 2/2/2026 10:51 AM
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This is the best course of action in trying to keep families as intact as possible. Obviously, some grandparents may not be fit to be guardians either - and this bill does not guarantee grandparent will be given custody. But it does support the idea of stable families by giving the grandparents priority consideration.



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WITNESS NAME		
INDIVIDUAL:		
WITNESS NAME: AIMEE ROBERTSON		PHONE NUMBER:
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY:		STATE: ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 1/31/2026 4:22 PM
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I oppose this bill only because it doesn't seem to specify that the proposed grandparent or grandparents who may gain custody of the child must also be deemed fit and suitable to be the child's custodian. The bill seems to indicate that they are given priority but not that they must also meet the standards required to take custody of the child. If this language to indicate this was added, I would be more in support of this bill.



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WITNESS NAME		
INDIVIDUAL:		
WITNESS NAME: EMILY STOINSKI		PHONE NUMBER:
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY:		STATE: ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 2/2/2026 5:41 PM
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My name is Emily Stoinski, and I am a registered Missouri voter. I am writing in opposition to HB 2505 not because I am not in favor of grandparents receiving custody, but I do not believe there is enough information provided to the public as to why this needs to be the next default. It may be in the best interest for other family to be next of kin. I think there needs to be more flexibility given to meet family needs.



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WITNESS NAME		
REGISTERED LOBBYIST:		
WITNESS NAME: JEFF STACK		PHONE NUMBER:
REPRESENTING: MID-MO FELLOWSHIP OF RECONCILIATION		TITLE:
ADDRESS: PO BOX 268		
CITY: COLUMBIA		STATE: MO
		ZIP: 65205
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE:	SUBMIT DATE: 2/3/2026 12:00 AM
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WITNESS NAME			
REGISTERED LOBBYIST:			
WITNESS NAME: JEFF STACK		PHONE NUMBER: 573-449-4585	
REPRESENTING: MID-MO FELLOWSHIP OF RECONCILIATION		TITLE:	
ADDRESS: PO BOX 268			
CITY: COLUMBIA		STATE: MO	ZIP: 65205
EMAIL: jstack@formissouri.org	ATTENDANCE: In-Person	SUBMIT DATE: 2/3/2026 11:42 PM	
THE INFORMATION ON THIS FORM IS PUBLIC RECORD UNDER CHAPTER 610, RSMo.			

My name is Jeff Stack. I am testifying on behalf of the Mid-Missouri Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), an interfaith social justice and peace group based in Columbia.

It seems the intent of HB 2505 is kind-hearted but ultimately the bill seems unnecessary and potentially problematic, thus we urge the House Children and Families Committee to vote it "Do Not Pass."

When a court has to take the unfortunate (but at times, critical) action, ruling that both parents of a child are unfit, unsuitable or unable to be the primary care-giver(s), Missouri law already directs the court to award custody based on who would serve "the best interests of the child." There is also an inclination in the statute for the court to consider relatives, including grandparents, though they are not named in current state law.

Each case is different but in all situations, what is best for the child should be the deciding factor in who assumes custody. In many cases (and quite likely a plurality, perhaps) the grandparent or grandparents would be the best candidate(s) to care for the child.

A friend of mine, Val Brown, raised her two granddaughters after their mother, Val's daughter Angie was murdered in 2000 by the father of their kids. She did a great job in being their sole caretaker. I continue to be an honorific uncle and friend to Val's granddaughters, now in their mid-20's and living independently in the Kansas City area.

To change the law and establish that "priority (should be) given to the grandparent or grandparents," however, could ignore those instances where the grandparent may have been abusive or neglectful of that grandchild. There are also situations where the child's grandparent may have been a poor parent--contributing negatively to the rearing of the individual the court ultimately rules is unfit to care for their child or children. Dysfunction and abuse can be inter-generational realities.

I worked for a few years in group homes operated by what had been Butterfield Youth Services in Marshall, MO. In most cases, courts had taken boys and girls out of abusive and/or neglectful homes and placed them in the agency's group homes. Butterfield's goal was to work toward reunifying children with their parents if possible but if that wasn't in the child's best interest, grandparents or another relative were next considered. At times, no relatives, including grandparents, were going to be able to provide a safe and loving home for the child. Foster families with no blood relation next became the caregivers granted custody of the young people.

Ultimately, the decision about who should be given custody again should be based on what is best for the child. Current Missouri law already provides such guidance. HB 2505 is unnecessary and could unintentionally put some children in greater harm. Please vote "No," recommending that it not be passed.



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WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: SARAH BERRY		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 2/1/2026 7:32 PM	

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HB 2505 represents a fundamental and dangerous shift in Missouri child-custody law by subordinating the individualized “best interests of the child” standard to a legislatively imposed presumption of equal parenting time.

While framed as neutral and balanced, the bill in practice handcuffs judicial discretion, elevates parental entitlement over child safety, and increases litigation risk in high-conflict and abuse-adjacent cases.

The rebuttable presumption of equal or near-equal parenting time reverses long-standing Missouri jurisprudence that custody determinations must be fact-specific, child-centered, and case-by-case.

Courts are no longer starting from the child’s lived reality, but from a statutory outcome the judge must justify deviating from—even where instability, coercive control, mental health concerns, or developmental needs are present but difficult to “prove” by a preponderance of evidence.

The bill’s domestic-violence carve-out is insufficient and LEGALLY NAIVE.

Abuse does not always present as a clean “pattern” under §455.010, and many victims—particularly those without resources—cannot safely meet evidentiary burdens early in proceedings.

HB 2505 effectively forces survivors to litigate abuse before custody, placing both children and protective parents at heightened risk.

Further, the bill converts policy preferences into mandates by requiring written findings whenever equal custody is denied, chilling judicial willingness to deviate even when deviation is warranted.

This is not neutrality—it is legislative pressure on the bench, substituting ideology for professional judgment.

HB 2505 also creates perverse incentives: parents are rewarded for obstruction, delay, and forced cooperation, while children are treated as divisible assets rather than individuals with developmental, emotional, and safety needs.

Equal time is not the same as equitable care, and the state has no legitimate interest in imposing symmetry where it undermines stability.

Missouri courts already possess the authority—and responsibility—to encourage meaningful parental involvement without sacrificing safety or discretion.

HB 2505 solves no identified problem, ignores empirical evidence, and risks institutionalizing harm in the name of formal equality.

It should be rejected.

HB 2505 doesn't trust judges to judge—an irony, given the sponsor.

Footnotes:

See *Troxel v. Granville*, 530 U.S. 57 (2000) (affirming that child-rearing determinations require individualized judicial assessment and warning against blanket presumptions that override best-interest analysis).

See *J.A.T. v. K.L.T.*, 357 S.W.3d 291 (Mo. App. 2011) (holding that custody determinations must be grounded in specific facts affecting the child's welfare, not generalized policy preferences).

See *Nichols v. Nichols*, 14 S.W.3d 630 (Mo. App. 2000) (recognizing that joint custody is inappropriate where parental conflict or power imbalance undermines cooperation, regardless of abstract fairness).

See *In re Marriage of Sutton*, 233 S.W.3d 786 (Mo. App. 2007) (emphasizing judicial discretion in weighing domestic-violence evidence even absent formal findings under protective-order statutes).