

Pennsylvania House Judiciary Committee Hearing  
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Senate Bill 1107 Testimony  
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Good morning, Chairman and honorable members of the committee. My name is Matthew Dohner and I am a Sergeant in the United State Army National Guard. I come before you today to express my support for Senator Folmer's Senate Bill 1107. Senate Bill 1107 will not only affect military members across the state but will personally affect me. My story is one that is echoed not only across Pennsylvania but also across the country. Today, I would like to share with you a condensed version of my situation.

I am dad to a 10-year-old daughter and have had primary custody since she was 3-months-old. In 2004, I was deployed to Iraq. At the time, I was living with my mother and as per my military family care plan my mother assumed full-time care of my daughter. During my deployment my daughter's mother sued me for custody because, and I quote from her petition for custody, "He has been away from the child for an extended period of time." Not only was I fighting in a warzone but I was also fighting a battle at home to keep custody of my daughter. This added to the stress level that I was already under fighting for my country, which I was proud to do. Not only did my mother have to have the stress of a son in a war but she also had the stress of fighting for me to keep custody of my daughter. This also was a very stressful time for my then 6-year-old daughter. Not only was I not around to help explain the situation to her but the situation was freely spoken about at her mother's home while she was on her weekend visits. No child should have to be subject to the thought that he or she will be taken from the only home that they know and put into another while their primary parent is deployed.

Men and women across this state are fighting in Afghanistan or Iraq. No one should have the additional stress of their child being taken away from them while they are at war. This is a dangerous distraction while their thoughts should be on keeping themselves and fellow service men and women alive.

In conclusion, I would like to deeply stress that this is an undue hardship that soldiers and their families should not have to encounter. I plead with you today, to pass Senate Bill 1107 out of committee and onto a vote, so that no other military family has to go through this additional stress while deployed. Today, my wife and I are raising a wonderful young lady. Both my wife and I are in the Guard. With the wars still waging and probable future deployments, my thoughts go to my family and what additional fights we may be subject to if Senate Bill 1107 is not passed.

I would like to thank the committee for allowing me to share my story with you. If there are any questions, I would be happy to answer them.