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## Equal Parenting Bill (HB 5267) Key Messages & Talking Points February 2006

- Unfortunately, over 50% of all marriages in the state result in divorce. Every day in Michigan, over 2.5 million children are denied daily interaction with both of their parents.
- Despite the fact that Michigan law prohibits that gender be used to award child custody, decades of family law and custom demonstrate that in the vast majority of cases, mothers become custodial parents while fathers are relegated to having their children only 4 nights per month. In fact, joint physical custody is awarded in less than 20% of all cases.
- Significant social research concludes that children fare much better with two-parent involvement in their lives, as fatherless children do far worse in school, are more prone to depression, more likely to abuse drugs, get involved in crime, and commit suicide, and are at much greater risk of becoming teen parents.
- Contemporary family advocates recognize that the “best interests of the child” are served when both parents are actively involved in the upbringing of their children. Our state’s public policy goal should be to promote continued parental access and responsibility, and custody criteria should be updated to reflect current social situations.
- [HB 5267](#) (Mortimer) is a common-sense piece of legislation which will amend current law so that a parenting plan drafted and agreed to by both parents will be followed in custody cases following divorce. In cases where parents cannot agree, the courts will presume the right of both parents to joint physical and legal custody of minor children unless there is clear and convincing evidence that one parent is unfit, unwilling or unable to handle their parental responsibilities.
- Passage of **HB 5267** will make the presumption of equal custody the rule rather than the exception in Michigan.
- Passage of **HB 5267** will allow both parents to retain physical custody of their children for alternating and substantially equal periods of time, and both would maintain the legal right to authorize medical treatment, have access to school records, and so forth.
- Despite the initial and outrageous claims of opponents regarding this bill, we welcome a healthy and vigorous debate on how child custody law reform can work to improve outcomes for all of Michigan’s children.
- **Dads of Michigan** is a responsible fatherhood education and advocacy organization dedicated to keeping both biological parents actively engaged in the lives of their children. The **Family Rights Coalition of Michigan** supports the rights of all parents, regardless of gender or marital status, to have full, equal and loving access to their children.

***Because the best parent is both parents!!***