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NPO Ohio Parenting Time Rules Report: Executive Summary 2020

[National Parents Organization](#) has completed the [2020 NPO Ohio Parenting Time Rules Report](#). This report, which updates the *2018 NPO Ohio Parenting Time Report*, analyzes and evaluates the parenting time guidelines of each of Ohio's 88 county domestic relations courts. These statutorily required guidelines are intended to guide divorcing parents in setting a parenting time schedule for their children and, often, are explicitly presented as default schedules, "for parents who cannot agree otherwise." Because these guideline schedules have a significant effect on the schedules parents agree on and those imposed when parents do not agree, they are important factors in shaping the actual parenting of children of divorced parents.

A large and compelling body of recent scientific research shows that children of separated parents benefit from substantially equal parenting time with each parent. (See the NPO website for citations and links to [recent research articles](#) and [videos of conference presentations](#).) This means that the defaults that courts set in place are significant factors in promoting the best interest of children. And, importantly, the research established that this is true even for infants and toddlers and even when parents are in (non-violent) high-conflict relationships.

NPO's study focuses on "ordinary parenting time", meaning non-holiday/non-vacation time. This is time that is vital to establishing a true parent/child relationship. The study was also restricted to the guidelines that courts apply to parents living in close proximity, based on the individual court's definition of that term.

As was true in 2018, the results of NPO's study, reported in the [2020 NPO Ohio Parenting Time Rules Report](#) are distressing! While there has been progress in a handful of Ohio counties—in several cases, very significant progress—the overwhelming majority of Ohio courts still rely on outdated, scientifically unsupported, guidelines for parenting time.

Ohio Counties vary widely—indeed, wildly—in their parenting time guidelines.

- Fifty-eight of Ohio's 88 counties have a parenting schedule that allows the children only two overnights and 60 hours or less with one of their parents in a two-week period. This means that the children are with their non-residential parent less than 20% of the ordinary parenting time. None of these counties' schedules provide for the children to be with the non-residential parent on a school night.
- Twelve Ohio counties provide default schedules that allow the children 4-5 overnights with the non-residential parent and substantially more time with the non-residential parent, between 25% and 30%.

- As of August 2020, six Ohio counties provide default schedules that allow the children equal, or nearly equal, time with each parent. This is twice the number of counties that did so in 2018.
- Eleven Ohio counties provide multiple schedules for children of the same age groups with none identified as the default schedule. Five of these counties include as options one or more schedules that allow the children equal time with each parent.

The wide variation, alone, undermines any claim that Ohio counties' parenting time schedules being are based on research about what parenting arrangements promote child well-being. It is just not believable that, for children in Stillwater, Ohio (Tuscarawas County), it is presumptively in their best interest to be with their separated parents equal amounts of time but for children in Tippecanoe, Ohio (Harrison County)—just five miles away—it is presumptively in their best interest to see one of their parents only every other weekend and one evening a week for a few hours.

Ohio counties are also divided over whether children's interests are served by parenting time guidelines that are age-sensitive or not. Forty-two counties have age-sensitive schedules, though some are minimally sensitive to children's ages; forty-six counties impose the same schedules on children of all ages, from birth to 18 years.

Surprisingly, 33 Ohio counties still use the outdated language of 'visitation' to talk about all of the time that the children are in the care and physical custody of one of their parents. This number represents some progress; in 2018, 39 counties' rules contained this offensive language.

Using county population data from the U.S. Census Bureau, NPO estimates that more than 45% of Ohio families are subjected to parenting time guidelines that allow children just two overnights in a two week period with one of their parents. This is down slightly from just over 50% in 2018. And, in 2020, about 4% of Ohio families reside in counties whose guidelines allow children equal, or nearly equal, time with both of their fit and loving parents. This is a depressingly small number, but it represents more than a *doubling* of the number since 2018. ***The number of Ohioans who gained a presumption of equal parenting time since the publication of the 2018 NPO Ohio Parenting Time Report is well more than a quarter of a million!***

Ohio courts are directed to make decisions about parenting time in the best interest of the children. NPO's study demonstrates that, despite the significant progress that some county courts have made, most Ohio domestic relations courts do not have parenting time guidelines that research shows are in children's best interest.

NPO notes with satisfaction and optimism that ***every Ohio county court of common pleas that has revised its local parenting time rule since the publication of the 2018 NPO Ohio Parenting Time Report has improved the rule.*** With only one exception, these changes have been to adopt schedules that provide a presumption of equal parenting time or ones that offers multiple schedules, at least one of which provides for equal parenting time.

We believe that if other Ohio courts would undertake a serious review of their parenting time rules in light of the best research on child well-being, they too would update their rules to align with that research and with modern parenting practices. For the sake of Ohio's children, we urge Ohio courts to do this!