

## Maurice Vellacott's Prepared Statement for Press Conference June 17, 2009, 1:30pm

Unfortunately, many Canadian families experience the breakup of a marriage. When this happens, the results can be devastating for children. Children are caught in the middle, but should not be used as a weapon or alienated from one of the parents.

Aside from proven abuse or neglect, Canadians want equal shared parenting to be the presumption in our courts when marriages break up because it is in the best interests of children and because it is part of an enlightened equality agenda.

*Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff has written, "These groups demanded that the 'custody and access' regime created by the Divorce Act of 1985 be replaced with a 'shared parent' regime in which both parents are given equal rights to bring up their children. These are sensible and overdue suggestions, and the fact they are being made shows that men and women are struggling to correct the rights revolution, so that equality works for everyone."*

Bill C-422 would direct courts to make equal shared parenting the presumptive arrangement in the best interests of the child, except in **proven** cases of abuse or neglect.

This bill is very important in bringing Canadian legislation in line with what the best research says about the best interests of children. With limited exceptions, children generally demonstrate superior outcomes when both parents – mom AND dad – are actively involved in their children's lives, even if the parents divorce or separate.

This bill also reflects the spirit of recommendations made over 10 years ago in a Joint House-Senate committee presented to Parliament entitled "For the Sake of the Children."

A recent poll I commissioned, conducted by Nanos Research, shows that 78% of Canadians support equal shared parenting, with a high of 86% support in the province of Quebec. Slightly more women than men support equal shared parenting. Among supporters of major political parties, about 78% of Conservatives support equal shared parenting; 75.8% of the NDP; 80.6% of Liberals supported equal shared parenting; and 83% of Bloc supporters endorsed equal shared parenting.

I am grateful today for the many expressions of support from Parliamentarians on a multi-party basis. I am thankful that two of my colleagues, Liberal MP Raymonde Folco and Steven Blaney, both representing Quebec ridings, are on the platform today and can speak to the French perspective on this widely-supported initiative in Quebec.

Countries, such as Denmark, Belgium and Norway, as well as some U.S. states, have implemented equal parenting, joint custody or shared parenting presumptive legislation, resulting in lower court costs, less conflict and improved social outcomes for the children of divorce.

In the few years that I have been dealing with this issue, I have heard from so many men and women who have urged me to pursue these reforms. In just the past 24 hours since introducing this bill, I have received an outpouring of thanks and appreciation from across Canada. Many of these people have been working with their own Members of Parliament, as well as with their provincial politicians, to build a strong non-partisan foundation for pursuing lasting equal shared parenting reforms that will be in the best interests of Canadian children.

Equal shared parenting is the right thing to do for Canadian children. As Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff has said, “these are sensible and overdue suggestions, and the fact they are being made shows that men and women are struggling to correct the rights revolution, so that equality works for everyone.”

This bill is one of the most apolitical, non-partisan pieces of legislation introduced in this current Parliament. I look forward to strong support for this important piece of legislation from all members of Parliament who are committed to the best interests of our Canadian children.