

MECKLENBURG LEGISLATORS – April 24, 2015 – Address by Sheila Peltzer

Good morning & thank you for this opportunity.

I'm Short Sheila from Charlotte asking you to PLEASE support SB519 & HB764, the SHARED PARENTING bills now pending in our legislature. Most of you know me because I've hounded you on this issue for 7 long years. Why? Because, as Juan Williams told us at Johnson C. Smith University, 70% of black children, 50% of Hispanic children, & 30% of white children are now born to single mothers. We have an EPIDEMIC of single mothers—in other words, fatherless children. These were the at-risk kids in my classroom, & these ARE the at-risk kids in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools--our dropouts, our poor, our homeless, our pregnant teens, our substance abusers, our gang members, our juvenile criminals & suicides. The Urban Institute of UNC- Charlotte just reported there are 47,000 single-parent households in Mecklenburg County, & last year the Annie E. Casey Foundation ranked NC 34<sup>th</sup> in the US for overall child well-being. We MUST figure out ways to keep more fathers in our children's lives.

Modernizing custody law to "SHARED PARENTING" is ONE way, the way I care about most since our 4 grandchildren, 2 of whom have a fatal genetic disease, basically lost their father & half their support system in family court in 2007. How did I cope with our grandchildren's double tragedy? By attempting to climb Mt. Kilimanjaro (show banner).

Our volunteer group, KN2P (KidsNeed2Parents), works to modernize the current vague "child's best interest" custody standard because mothers win custody about 85% of the time & fathers become "visitors". SHARED PARENTING—with the child spending MAXIMUM time with BOTH parents--IS in the CBI. A vast amount of research is clear on this issue. We work closely with Dr. Linda Nielsen, research professor at Wake Forest University, & she & I both belong to LeadingWomen4SharedParenting. KN2P works statewide, including Raleigh. I'm giving each of you the story of an African-American father's unsuccessful efforts in Wake family court to have a meaningful relationship with his children. I have a folder full of similar stories (show) from around the state—but mostly from Mecklenburg County, our home base. You're welcome to read them.

SHARED PARENTING is the norm in today's intact 2-working parent families. I see it in my family, my neighborhood, at the Levine Children's Hospital where I volunteer weekly--dads diapering, feeding, playing with their children. Our son could diaper his kids in the dark, & he tube fed the sick ones & coached the older ones in soccer.

SHARED PARENTING increases child support compliance, reduces parental conflict & domestic violence, & allows stressed parents more time to work, further their education, & relax. But the National Parents Organization rated NC a D in its 2014 Shared Parenting Report Card. Currently 18 states have shared parenting bills pending in their legislatures, & several states already have such LAWS--with good results reported. Mecklenburg County's CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE just sent a letter to you saying it supports these proposed SHARED PARENTING bills. Please help us climb THIS Kilimanjaro one step at a time—or poli, poli, as they say. I implore you to do what is right by our children on this bipartisan issue & support SHARED PARENTING SB519 & HB764. Thank you for your service for our COMMON good.