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## **DADS OF MICHIGAN PAC Children Need Both Parents Petition**

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**BLOOMFIELD HILLS, MI** – A petition drive to pass legislation to amend Michigan child custody law creating a rebuttable presumption of joint legal and physical custody to the parties of a divorce will be launched on March 12. The petition is to place the legislation on the November 2nd, 2004 general election ballot to amend the Child Custody Act of 1970.

Known as the "**Children Need Both Parents Petition**", the new legislation would require Circuit Court judges to presume joint physical and legal custody in divorce unless one party presents clear and convincing evidence of unfitness.

Current law leaves judges far more discretion when awarding custody, requiring only that both parties be advised of joint custody. Current practice of Michigan law awards physical custody to one parent in 89% of the cases and presumes custody of the Mother in unwed situations.

In addition, the bill would encourage parents to present a mutually agreed upon parenting plan for all minor children. If the parties cannot agree, the court would be required to impose a 50/50 joint physical and legal custody parenting plan.

The petition drive is being led by Dads of Michigan, a state wide, non-profit equal parenting group based out of Bloomfield Hills.

The petition drive is being supported by a diverse group of organizations throughout the State of Michigan to canvas for signatures in Michigan's 83 counties. Plans are

underway for teams of workers to criss-cross the state to help organize the local petition efforts and to coordinate activities through various internet and realtime communications.

According to the Department of Health and Human Services Bureau of the Census, children from fatherless homes are 5 times more likely to commit suicide, 20 times more likely to have behavioral disorders, 9 times more likely to drop out of high school, and 10 times more likely to abuse chemical substances. Supports of the petition point to these statistics as proof that joint custody is truly in the best interest of children.

Parenting is not a light switch you turn on and off. You don't parent children at certain times and then stop until it is time to parent again. Yet family law judicial systems issue orders that permit the majority of noncustodial parents to spend less than 30% of their time parenting, said Patti Diroff of the Children's Rights Council.

Petitioners will be outside local post offices and other public locations starting Saturday March 13 in an effort to obtain 254,206 signatures required to pass the petition. The **proposal will be voted on November 2 in the General Election.**

***DADS OF MICHIGAN*** ([www.dadsofmichigan.org](http://www.dadsofmichigan.org)) and ***DADS OF MICHIGAN PAC*** are responsible fatherhood advocacy organizations dedicated to keeping both biological parents actively engaged in the lives of their children despite divorce and custody, in most instances. They believe men and women should be viewed equally under the law and their credo is: "*fathers are responsible parents too...because the best parent is both parents.*" For more information, please contact them at (248) 559-DADS.