

SENATE BILL NO. 1371

103RD GENERAL ASSEMBLY

INTRODUCED BY SENATOR BRATTIN.

5153S.011

KRISTINA MARTIN, Secretary

AN ACT

To repeal section 452.375, RSMo, and to enact in lieu thereof one new section relating to child custody.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Missouri, as follows:

Section A. Section 452.375, RSMo, is repealed and one new
2 section enacted in lieu thereof, to be known as section 452.375,
3 to read as follows:

452.375. 1. As used in this chapter, unless the
2 context clearly indicates otherwise:

3 (1) "Custody" means joint legal custody, sole legal
4 custody, joint physical custody or sole physical custody or
5 any combination thereof;

6 (2) "Joint legal custody" means that the parents share
7 the decision-making rights, responsibilities, and authority
8 relating to the health, education and welfare of the child,
9 and[, unless allocated, apportioned, or decreed,] the
10 parents shall confer with one another in the exercise of
11 decision-making rights, responsibilities, and authority;

12 (3) "Joint physical custody" means an order awarding
13 each of the parents [significant, but not necessarily
14 equal,] **equal or substantially equal** periods of time during
15 which a child resides with or is under the care and
16 supervision of each of the parents. Joint physical custody
17 shall be shared by the parents in such a way as to assure

EXPLANATION-Matter enclosed in bold-faced brackets [thus] in this bill is not enacted and is intended to be omitted in the law.

18 the child of frequent, continuing and meaningful contact
19 with both parents;

20 (4) "Third-party custody" means a third party
21 designated as a legal and physical custodian pursuant to
22 subdivision (5) of subsection 5 of this section.

23 2. The court shall determine custody in accordance
24 with the best interests of the child. There shall be a
25 rebuttable presumption that an award of equal or
26 [approximately] **substantially** equal parenting time to each
27 parent is in the best interests of the child. Such
28 presumption is rebuttable only by a preponderance of the
29 evidence in accordance with all relevant factors, including,
30 but not limited to, the factors contained in subdivisions
31 (1) to [(8)] **(9)** of this subsection. The presumption may be
32 rebutted if the court finds that the parents have reached an
33 agreement on all issues related to custody, or if the court
34 finds that a pattern of domestic violence has occurred as
35 set out in subdivision [(6)] **(7)** of this subsection. When
36 the parties have not reached an agreement on all issues
37 related to custody, the court shall consider all relevant
38 factors and enter written findings of fact and conclusions
39 of law, including, but not limited to, the following:

40 (1) The wishes of the child's parents as to custody
41 and the proposed parenting plan submitted by both parties;

42 (2) The needs of the child for a frequent, continuing
43 and meaningful relationship with both parents and the
44 ability and willingness of parents to actively perform their
45 functions as mother and father for the needs of the child;

46 (3) The interaction and interrelationship of the child
47 with parents, siblings, and any other person who may
48 significantly affect the child's best interests;

49 (4) Which parent is more likely to allow the child
50 frequent, continuing and meaningful contact with the other
51 parent **and the willingness and ability of parents to**
52 **cooperate in the rearing of their child, to maximize sharing**
53 **information and minimize exposure of the child to parental**
54 **conflict, and to utilize methods for resolving disputes**
55 **regarding any major decision concerning the life of the**
56 **child;**

57 (5) The child's adjustment to the child's home,
58 school, and community. The fact that a parent sends his or
59 her child or children to a home school or FPE school shall
60 not be the sole factor that a court considers in determining
61 custody of such child or children;

62 (6) The mental and physical health of all individuals
63 involved, including **any substance abuse history experienced**
64 **by either parent;**

65 (7) Any history of abuse of any individuals involved,
66 including domestic and child abuse. In determining whether
67 the presumption is rebutted by a pattern of domestic
68 violence, the court shall consider the nature and context of
69 the domestic violence and the implications of the domestic
70 violence for parenting and for the child's safety, well-
71 being, and developmental needs. If the court finds that a
72 pattern of domestic violence as defined in section 455.010
73 has occurred, and, if the court also finds that awarding
74 custody to the abusive parent is in the best interest of the
75 child, then the court shall enter written findings of fact
76 and conclusions of law. Custody and visitation rights shall
77 be ordered in a manner that best protects the child and any
78 other child or children for whom the parent has custodial or
79 visitation rights, and the parent or other family or

household member who is the victim of domestic violence from any further harm;

[(7) The intention of either parent to relocate the principal residence of the child; and]

(8) The [unobstructed input of a child, free of coercion and manipulation, as to the child's custodial arrangement] **distance between the residences of the parents seeking custody, including consideration of any relocation which has occurred or an intent to relocate; and**

(9) **The unobstructed input of the child, free of coercion and manipulation, as to the child's custodial arrangement, if the court deems the child to be of sufficient ability, age, and maturity to express an independent, reliable preference with due consideration of the influence that a parent may have on the child's input.**

3. (1) In any court proceedings relating to custody of a child, the court shall not award custody or unsupervised visitation of a child to a parent if such parent or any person residing with such parent has been found guilty of, or pled guilty to, any of the following offenses when a child was the victim:

(a) A felony violation of section 566.030, 566.031, 566.032, 566.060, 566.061, 566.062, 566.064, 566.067, 566.068, 566.083, 566.100, 566.101, 566.111, 566.151, 566.203, 566.206, 566.209, 566.211, or 566.215;

(b) A violation of section 568.020;

(c) A violation of subdivision (2) of subsection 1 of section 568.060;

(d) A violation of section 568.065;

(e) A violation of section 573.200;

(f) A violation of section 573.205; or

(g) A violation of section 568.175.

(2) For all other violations of offenses in chapters 566 and 568 not specifically listed in subdivision (1) of this subsection or for a violation of an offense committed in another state when a child is the victim that would be a violation of chapter 566 or 568 if committed in Missouri, the court may exercise its discretion in awarding custody or visitation of a child to a parent if such parent or any person residing with such parent has been found guilty of, or pled guilty to, any such offense.

4. The general assembly finds and declares that it is the public policy of this state that frequent, continuing and meaningful contact with both parents after the parents have separated or dissolved their marriage is in the best interest of the child, except for cases where the court specifically finds that such contact is not in the best interest of the child, and that it is the public policy of this state to encourage parents to participate in decisions affecting the health, education and welfare of their children, and to resolve disputes involving their children amicably through alternative dispute resolution. In order to effectuate these policies, the general assembly encourages the court to enter a temporary parenting plan as early as practicable in a proceeding under this chapter, consistent with the provisions of subsection 2 of this section, and, in so doing, the court shall determine the custody arrangement which will best assure both parents participate in such decisions and have frequent, continuing and meaningful contact with their children so long as it is in the best interests of the child.

5. Prior to awarding the appropriate custody arrangement in the best interest of the child, the court shall consider each of the following as follows:

(1) Joint physical and joint legal custody to both parents, which shall not be denied solely for the reason that one parent opposes a joint physical and joint legal custody award. The residence of one of the parents shall be designated as the address of the child for mailing and educational purposes;

(2) Joint physical custody with one party granted sole legal custody. The residence of one of the parents shall be designated as the address of the child for mailing and educational purposes;

(3) Joint legal custody with one party granted sole physical custody;

(4) Sole custody to either parent; or

(5) Third-party custody or visitation:

(a) When the court finds that each parent is unfit, unsuitable, or unable to be a custodian, or the welfare of the child requires, and it is in the best interests of the child, then custody, temporary custody or visitation may be awarded to a person related by consanguinity or affinity to the child. If no person related to the child by consanguinity or affinity is willing to accept custody, then the court may award custody to any other person or persons deemed by the court to be suitable and able to provide an adequate and stable environment for the child. Before the court awards custody, temporary custody or visitation to a third person under this subdivision, the court shall make that person a party to the action;

(b) Under the provisions of this subsection, any person may petition the court to intervene as a party in interest at any time as provided by supreme court rule.

6. If the parties have not agreed to a custodial arrangement, or the court determines such arrangement is not

in the best interest of the child, the court shall include a written finding in the judgment or order based on the public policy in subsection 4 of this section and each of the factors listed in subdivisions (1) to ~~[(8)]~~ (9) of subsection 2 of this section detailing the specific relevant factors that made a particular arrangement in the best interest of the child. If a proposed custodial arrangement is rejected by the court, the court shall include a written finding in the judgment or order detailing the specific relevant factors resulting in the rejection of such arrangement.

7. Upon a finding by the court that either parent has refused to exchange information with the other parent, which shall include but not be limited to information concerning the health, education and welfare of the child, the court shall order the parent to comply immediately and to pay the prevailing party a sum equal to the prevailing party's cost associated with obtaining the requested information, which shall include but not be limited to reasonable attorney's fees and court costs.

8. As between the parents of a child, no preference may be given to either parent in the awarding of custody because of that parent's age, sex, or financial status, nor because of the age or sex of the child. The court shall not presume that a parent, solely because of his or her sex, is more qualified than the other parent to act as a joint or sole legal or physical custodian for the child.

9. Any judgment providing for custody shall include a specific written parenting plan setting forth the terms of such parenting plan arrangements specified in subsection 8 of section 452.310. Such plan may be a parenting plan submitted by the parties pursuant to section 452.310 or, in

the absence thereof, a plan determined by the court, but in all cases, the custody plan approved and ordered by the court shall be in the court's discretion and shall be in the best interest of the child.

10. After August 28, 2016, every court order establishing or modifying custody or visitation shall include the following language: "In the event of noncompliance with this order, the aggrieved party may file a verified motion for contempt. If custody, visitation, or third-party custody is denied or interfered with by a parent or third party without good cause, the aggrieved person may file a family access motion with the court stating the specific facts that constitute a violation of the custody provisions of the judgment of dissolution, legal separation, or judgment of paternity. The circuit clerk will provide the aggrieved party with an explanation of the procedures for filing a family access motion and a simple form for use in filing the family access motion. A family access motion does not require the assistance of legal counsel to prepare and file.".

11. No court shall adopt any local rule, form, or practice requiring a standardized or default parenting plan for interim, temporary, or permanent orders or judgments. Notwithstanding any other provision of law to the contrary, a court may enter an interim order in a proceeding under this chapter, provided that the interim order shall not contain any provisions about child custody or a parenting schedule or plan without first providing the parties with notice and a hearing, unless the parties otherwise agree.

12. Unless a parent has been denied custody rights pursuant to this section or visitation rights under section 452.400, both parents shall have access to records and

information pertaining to a minor child including, but not limited to, medical, dental, and school records. If the parent without custody has been granted restricted or supervised visitation because the court has found that the parent with custody or any child has been the victim of domestic violence, as defined in section 455.010, by the parent without custody, the court may order that the reports and records made available pursuant to this subsection not include the address of the parent with custody or the child. A court shall order that the reports and records made available under this subsection not include the address of the parent with custody if the parent with custody is a participant in the address confidentiality program under section 589.663. Unless a parent has been denied custody rights pursuant to this section or visitation rights under section 452.400, any judgment of dissolution or other applicable court order shall specifically allow both parents access to such records and reports.

13. Except as otherwise precluded by state or federal law, if any individual, professional, public or private institution or organization denies access or fails to provide or disclose any and all records and information, including, but not limited to, past and present dental, medical and school records pertaining to a minor child, to either parent upon the written request of such parent, the court shall, upon its finding that the individual, professional, public or private institution or organization denied such request without good cause, order that party to comply immediately with such request and to pay to the prevailing party all costs incurred, including, but not limited to, attorney's fees and court costs associated with obtaining the requested information.

272 14. An award of joint custody does not preclude an
273 award of child support pursuant to section 452.340 and
274 applicable supreme court rules. The court shall consider
275 the factors contained in section 452.340 and applicable
276 supreme court rules in determining an amount reasonable or
277 necessary for the support of the child.

278 15. If the court finds that domestic violence or abuse
279 as defined in section 455.010 has occurred, the court shall
280 make specific findings of fact to show that the custody or
281 visitation arrangement ordered by the court best protects
282 the child and the parent or other family or household member
283 who is the victim of domestic violence, as defined in
284 section 455.010, and any other children for whom such parent
285 has custodial or visitation rights from any further harm.

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