

AN ACT

To repeal sections 452.375 and 452.400, RSMo, and to enact in lieu thereof two new sections relating to parental visitation rights, with a penalty provision.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF MISSOURI, AS FOLLOWS:

Section A. Sections 452.375 and 452.400, RSMo, are repealed and two new sections enacted in lieu thereof, to be known as sections 452.375 and 452.400, to read as follows:

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

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

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

(3) "Joint physical custody" means an order awarding each of the parents significant, but not necessarily equal, periods of time during which a child resides with or is under the care and supervision of each of the parents. Joint physical custody shall

be shared by the parents in such a way as to assure the child of frequent, continuing and meaningful contact with both parents;

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

2. The court shall determine custody in accordance with the best interests of the child. The court shall consider all relevant factors including:

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

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

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

(4) Which parent is more likely to allow the child frequent, continuing and meaningful contact with the other parent;

(5) The child's adjustment to the child's home, school, and community;

(6) The mental and physical health of all individuals involved, including any history of abuse of any individuals involved. If the court finds that a pattern of domestic violence

has occurred, and, if the court also finds that awarding custody to the abusive parent is in the best interest of the child, then the court shall enter written findings of fact and conclusions of law. Custody and visitation rights shall be ordered in a manner that best protects the child and any other child or children for whom the parent has custodial or 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 wishes of a child as to the child's custodian.

The fact that a parent sends his or her child or children to a home school, as defined in section 167.031, RSMo, shall not be the sole factor that a court considers in determining custody of such child or children.

3. The court shall not award custody or unsupervised visitation of a child to a parent if such parent has been found guilty of, or pled guilty to, a felony violation of chapter 566, RSMo, when [the] such child or any other child was the victim, or a violation of chapter 568, RSMo, except for section 568.040, RSMo, when [the] such child or any other child was the victim.

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 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 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) 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.

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 7 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. 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 [the] any child has been the victim of domestic violence, as defined in section 455.200, RSMo, 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. 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.

11. 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.

12. An award of joint custody does not preclude an award of

child support pursuant to section 452.340 and applicable supreme court rules. The court shall consider the factors contained in section 452.340 and applicable supreme court rules in determining an amount reasonable or necessary for the support of the child.

13. If the court finds that domestic violence or abuse, as defined in sections 455.010 and 455.501, RSMo, has occurred, the court shall make specific findings of fact to show that the custody or visitation arrangement ordered by the court best protects the child and the parent or other family or household member who is the victim of domestic violence or abuse, as defined in sections 455.010 and 455.501, RSMo, and any other children for whom such parent has contact from any further harm.

452.400. 1. A parent not granted custody of the child is entitled to reasonable visitation rights unless the court finds, after a hearing, that visitation would endanger the child's physical health or impair his or her emotional development. The court shall enter an order specifically detailing the visitation rights of the parent without physical custody rights to the child and any other children for whom such parent has contact. In determining the granting of visitation rights, the court shall consider evidence of domestic violence. If the court finds that domestic violence has occurred, the court may find that granting visitation to the abusive party is in the best interests of the child. The court shall not grant visitation to the parent not granted custody if such parent has been found guilty of or pled

guilty to a felony violation of chapter 566, RSMo, when [the] a child was the victim, or a violation of chapter 568, RSMo, except for section 568.040, RSMo, when [the] a child was the victim or an offense committed in another state, when [the] a child is the victim, that would be a felony violation of chapter 566, RSMo, or chapter 568, RSMo, except for section 568.040, RSMo, if committed in Missouri. The court shall consider the parent's history of inflicting, or tendency to inflict, physical harm, bodily injury, assault, or the fear of physical harm, bodily injury, or assault on other persons and shall grant visitation in a manner that best protects the child and the parent or other family or household member who is the victim of domestic violence, and any other children for whom the parent has contact from any further harm. The court, if requested by a party, shall make specific findings of fact to show that the visitation arrangements made by the court best protect the child or the parent or other family or household member who is the victim of domestic violence, or any other child for whom the parent has contact from any further harm.

2. The court may modify an order granting or denying visitation rights whenever modification would serve the best interests of the child, but the court shall not restrict a parent's visitation rights unless it finds that the visitation would endanger the child's physical health or impair his or her emotional development. When a court restricts a parent's

visitation rights or when a court orders supervised visitation because of allegations of abuse or domestic violence, a showing of proof of treatment and rehabilitation shall be made to the court before unsupervised visitation may be ordered. "Supervised visitation", as used in this section, is visitation which takes place in the presence of a responsible adult appointed by the court for the protection of the child.

3. The court shall mandate compliance with its order by all parties to the action, including parents, children and third parties. In the event of noncompliance, the aggrieved person 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 which constitute a violation of the judgment of dissolution or legal separation. The state courts administrator shall develop a simple form for pro se motions to the aggrieved person, which shall be provided to the person by the circuit clerk. Clerks, under the supervision of a circuit clerk, shall explain to aggrieved parties the procedures for filing the form. Notice of the fact that clerks will provide such assistance shall be conspicuously posted in the clerk's offices. The location of the office where the family access motion may be filed shall be conspicuously posted in the court building. The performance of duties described in this section shall not constitute the

practice of law as defined in section 484.010, RSMo. Such form for pro se motions shall not require the assistance of legal counsel to prepare and file. The cost of filing the motion shall be the standard court costs otherwise due for instituting a civil action in the circuit court.

4. Within five court days after the filing of the family access motion pursuant to subsection 3 of this section, the clerk of the court shall issue a summons pursuant to applicable state law, and applicable local or supreme court rules. A copy of the motion shall be personally served upon the respondent by personal process server as provided by law or by any sheriff. Such service shall be served at the earliest time and shall take priority over service in other civil actions, except those of an emergency nature or those filed pursuant to chapter 455, RSMo. The motion shall contain the following statement in boldface type: "PURSUANT TO SECTION 452.400, RSMO, YOU ARE REQUIRED TO RESPOND TO THE CIRCUIT CLERK WITHIN TEN DAYS OF THE DATE OF SERVICE. FAILURE TO RESPOND TO THE CIRCUIT CLERK MAY RESULT IN THE FOLLOWING:

(1) AN ORDER FOR A COMPENSATORY PERIOD OF CUSTODY, VISITATION OR THIRD-PARTY CUSTODY AT A TIME CONVENIENT FOR THE AGGRIEVED PARTY NOT LESS THAN THE PERIOD OF TIME DENIED;

(2) PARTICIPATION BY THE VIOLATOR IN COUNSELING TO EDUCATE THE VIOLATOR ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF PROVIDING THE CHILD WITH A CONTINUING AND MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIP WITH BOTH PARENTS;

(3) ASSESSMENT OF A FINE OF UP TO FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS AGAINST THE VIOLATOR;

(4) REQUIRING THE VIOLATOR TO POST BOND OR SECURITY TO ENSURE FUTURE COMPLIANCE WITH THE COURT'S ORDERS;

(5) ORDERING THE VIOLATOR TO PAY THE COST OF COUNSELING TO REESTABLISH THE PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE AGGRIEVED PARTY AND THE CHILD; AND

(6) A JUDGMENT IN AN AMOUNT NOT LESS THAN THE REASONABLE EXPENSES, INCLUDING ATTORNEY'S FEES AND COURT COSTS ACTUALLY INCURRED BY THE AGGRIEVED PARTY AS A RESULT OF THE DENIAL OF CUSTODY, VISITATION OR THIRD-PARTY CUSTODY.".

5. If an alternative dispute resolution program is available pursuant to section 452.372, the clerk shall also provide information to all parties on the availability of any such services, and within fourteen days of the date of service, the court may schedule alternative dispute resolution.

6. Upon a finding by the court pursuant to a motion for a family access order or a motion for contempt that its order for custody, visitation or third-party custody has not been complied with, without good cause, the court shall order a remedy, which may include, but not be limited to:

(1) A compensatory period of visitation, custody or third-party custody at a time convenient for the aggrieved party not less than the period of time denied;

(2) Participation by the violator in counseling to educate

the violator about the importance of providing the child with a continuing and meaningful relationship with both parents;

(3) Assessment of a fine of up to five hundred dollars against the violator payable to the aggrieved party;

(4) Requiring the violator to post bond or security to ensure future compliance with the court's access orders; and

(5) Ordering the violator to pay the cost of counseling to reestablish the parent-child relationship between the aggrieved party and the child.

7. The reasonable expenses incurred as a result of denial or interference with custody or visitation, including attorney's fees and costs of a proceeding to enforce visitation rights, custody or third-party custody, shall be assessed, if requested and for good cause, against the parent or party who unreasonably denies or interferes with visitation, custody or third-party custody. In addition, the court may utilize any and all powers relating to contempt conferred on it by law or rule of the Missouri supreme court.

8. Final disposition of a motion for a family access order filed pursuant to this section shall take place not more than sixty days after the service of such motion, unless waived by the parties or determined to be in the best interest of the child. Final disposition shall not include appellate review.

9. Motions filed pursuant to this section shall not be deemed an independent civil action from the original action

pursuant to which the judgment or order sought to be enforced was entered.