

SECOND REGULAR SESSION

HOUSE BILL NO. 989

93RD GENERAL ASSEMBLY

INTRODUCED BY REPRESENTATIVES SATER (Sponsor), MUNZLINGER,
DUSENBERG AND WILSON (119) (Co-sponsors).

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STEPHEN S. DAVIS, Chief Clerk

3244L.01I

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Section A. Section 452.375, RSMo, is repealed and one new section enacted in lieu thereof, to be known as section 452.375, to read as follows: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

EXPLANATION — Matter enclosed in bold-faced brackets [thus] in the above bill is not enacted and is intended to be omitted from the law. Matter in **bold-face** type in the above bill is proposed language.

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

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

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

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

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

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

26 (6) The mental and physical health of all individuals involved, including any history of
27 abuse of any individuals involved. If the court finds that a pattern of domestic violence has
28 occurred, and, if the court also finds that awarding custody to the abusive parent is in the best
29 interest of the child, then the court shall enter written findings of fact and conclusions of law.
30 Custody and visitation rights shall be ordered in a manner that best protects the child and any
31 other child or children for whom the parent has custodial or visitation rights, and the parent or
32 other family or household member who is the victim of domestic violence from any further
33 harm;

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

35 (8) The wishes of a child as to the child's custodian; **and**

36 **(9) The opinions and recommendations provided to the court by a professional or**
37 **member of the clergy at the request of a parent. Nothing in this subdivision shall be**
38 **construed as conferring upon any professional or member of the clergy with a right to**
39 **intervene or otherwise participate in a child custody proceeding except at the request of**
40 **a parent.**

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42 The fact that a parent sends his or her child or children to a home school, as defined in section
43 167.031, RSMo, shall not be the sole factor that a court considers in determining custody of such
44 child or children.

45 3. (1) In any court proceedings relating to custody of a child, the court shall not award
46 custody or unsupervised visitation of a child to a parent if such parent or any person residing with
47 such parent has been found guilty of, or pled guilty to, any of the following offenses when a child
48 was the victim:

49 (a) A felony violation of section 566.030, 566.032, 566.040, 566.060, 566.062, 566.064,
50 566.067, 566.068, 566.070, 566.083, 566.090, 566.100, 566.111, 566.151, 566.203, 566.206,
51 566.209, 566.212, or 566.215, RSMo;

52 (b) A violation of section 568.020, RSMo;

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

54 (d) A violation of section 568.065, RSMo;

55 (e) A violation of section 568.080, RSMo;

56 (f) A violation of section 568.090, RSMo; or

57 (g) A violation of section 568.175, RSMo.

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

64 4. The general assembly finds and declares that it is the public policy of this state that
65 frequent, continuing and meaningful contact with both parents after the parents have separated
66 or dissolved their marriage is in the best interest of the child, except for cases where the court
67 specifically finds that such contact is not in the best interest of the child, and that it is the public
68 policy of this state to encourage parents to participate in decisions affecting the health, education
69 and welfare of their children, and to resolve disputes involving their children amicably through
70 alternative dispute resolution. In order to effectuate these policies, the court shall determine the
71 custody arrangement which will best assure both parents participate in such decisions and have
72 frequent, continuing and meaningful contact with their children so long as it is in the best
73 interests of the child.

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

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

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

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

84 (4) Sole custody to either parent; or

85 (5) Third-party custody or visitation:

86 (a) When the court finds that each parent is unfit, unsuitable, or unable to be a custodian,
87 or the welfare of the child requires, and it is in the best interests of the child, then custody,
88 temporary custody or visitation may be awarded to any other person or persons deemed by the
89 court to be suitable and able to provide an adequate and stable environment for the child. Before
90 the court awards custody, temporary custody or visitation to a third person under this
91 subdivision, the court shall make that person a party to the action;

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

94 6. If the parties have not agreed to a custodial arrangement, or the court determines such
95 arrangement is not in the best interest of the child, the court shall include a written finding in the
96 judgment or order based on the public policy in subsection 4 of this section and each of the
97 factors listed in subdivisions (1) to ~~[(8)]~~ (9) of subsection 2 of this section detailing the specific
98 relevant factors that made a particular arrangement in the best interest of the child. If a proposed
99 custodial arrangement is rejected by the court, the court shall include a written finding in the
100 judgment or order detailing the specific relevant factors resulting in the rejection of such
101 arrangement.

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

108 8. As between the parents of a child, no preference may be given to either parent in the
109 awarding of custody because of that parent's age, sex, or financial status, nor because of the age
110 or sex of the child.

111 9. Any judgment providing for custody shall include a specific written parenting plan
112 setting forth the terms of such parenting plan arrangements specified in subsection 7 of section
113 452.310. Such plan may be a parenting plan submitted by the parties pursuant to section 452.310
114 or, in the absence thereof, a plan determined by the court, but in all cases, the custody plan
115 approved and ordered by the court shall be in the court's discretion and shall be in the best
116 interest of the child.

117 10. Unless a parent has been denied custody rights pursuant to this section or visitation
118 rights under section 452.400, both parents shall have access to records and information
119 pertaining to a minor child, including, but not limited to, medical, dental, and school records.
120 If the parent without custody has been granted restricted or supervised visitation because the

121 court has found that the parent with custody or any child has been the victim of domestic
122 violence, as defined in section 455.200, RSMo, by the parent without custody, the court may
123 order that the reports and records made available pursuant to this subsection not include the
124 address of the parent with custody or the child. Unless a parent has been denied custody rights
125 pursuant to this section or visitation rights under section 452.400, any judgment of dissolution
126 or other applicable court order shall specifically allow both parents access to such records and
127 reports.

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

136 12. An award of joint custody does not preclude an award of child support pursuant to
137 section 452.340 and applicable supreme court rules. The court shall consider the factors
138 contained in section 452.340 and applicable supreme court rules in determining an amount
139 reasonable or necessary for the support of the child.

140 13. If the court finds that domestic violence or abuse, as defined in sections 455.010 and
141 455.501, RSMo, has occurred, the court shall make specific findings of fact to show that the
142 custody or visitation arrangement ordered by the court best protects the child and the parent or
143 other family or household member who is the victim of domestic violence or abuse, as defined
144 in sections 455.010 and 455.501, RSMo, and any other children for whom such parent has
145 custodial or visitation rights from any further harm.

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