

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2013 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Revised

Senate Bill 503

(Senator Zirkin)

Judicial Proceedings

Judiciary

Family Law - Grounds for Divorce

This bill alters the conditions that determine separation for the purpose of a court granting a limited or absolute divorce. The bill specifies that the parties may be considered to be living separate and apart without cohabitation even if the parties share living expenses and a residence, as long as the parties maintain separate bedrooms. Corroboration by a third party is not necessary to establish that the parties maintain separate bedrooms.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill's changes do not materially affect the workload of the Judiciary.

Local Effect: The bill's changes do not materially affect the workload for the circuit courts.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: A court may grant a limited divorce on the following grounds:

- cruelty of treatment of the complaining party or a minor child of the complaining party;
- excessively vicious conduct to the complaining party or to a minor child of the complaining party;
- desertion; or

- voluntary separation, if the parties are living separate and apart without cohabitation and there is no reasonable expectation of reconciliation.

Before granting a limited divorce, the court may require the parties to participate in efforts to achieve reconciliation as prescribed by the court. A divorce may be granted by the court for a limited or an indefinite time. A court that grants a limited divorce may revoke it at any time on the joint application of the parties. If the parties request an absolute divorce and the evidence is sufficient to entitle them to only a limited divorce, the court may grant a limited divorce.

A limited divorce does not sever the marriage, but does grant the complaining party the right to live separate and apart from the other spouse. A limited divorce can also address issues of custody, visitation, child support, alimony, and use and possession of a family home.

A court may grant an absolute divorce on the following grounds:

- adultery;
- desertion, if the desertion is deliberate and final, has continued for 12 months without interruption, and there is no reasonable expectation of reconciliation;
- conviction of a felony or misdemeanor in any state or federal court, if the defendant has been sentenced to serve at least three years, or an indeterminate sentence, and has served 12 months of the sentence;
- 12-month separation, when the parties have lived separate and apart without cohabitation for 12 months without interruption before the filing of the divorce application;
- insanity, as specified; or
- cruelty of treatment or excessively vicious conduct toward the complaining party or a minor child of the complaining party, if there is no reasonable expectation of reconciliation.

A court may not enter a decree of divorce on the uncorroborated testimony of the person who is seeking the divorce.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: HB 673 of 2012, a similar bill, received a hearing in the House Judiciary Committee, but no further action was taken. Its cross file, SB 334, passed the Senate as amended and received a hearing in the House Judiciary Committee, but no further action was taken. HB 403 of 2011, a similar bill, was withdrawn after receiving a

hearing in the House Judiciary Committee. Other similar bills, SB 578/HB 336 of 2010, received no further action after being heard in the Senate Judicial Proceedings and House Judiciary committees, respectively.

Cross File: HB 748 (Delegates Simmons and Kramer) - Judiciary.

Information Source(s): Judiciary (Administrative Office of the Courts), Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 26, 2013
mc/kdm Revised - Senate Third Reader - March 19, 2013

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