

HOUSE BILL 505

D4
HB 1328/20 – JUD

11r2009

By: **Delegate Dumais**

Introduced and read first time: January 15, 2021

Assigned to: Judiciary

Committee Report: Favorable with amendments

House action: Adopted

Read second time: March 5, 2021

CHAPTER _____

1 AN ACT concerning

2 **Child Custody – Legal Decision Making and Parenting Time**

3 FOR the purpose of repealing references to the terms “child custody” and “visitation” in
4 certain instances and substituting the terms “legal decision making” and “parenting
5 time” in certain instances; authorizing the court, in determining certain legal
6 decision–making authority and parenting time in certain child custody proceedings,
7 to consider certain factors; requiring the court to articulate certain findings of fact
8 on the record or in a written opinion; authorizing the court to award joint legal
9 decision making to both parties under certain circumstances; prohibiting a party
10 from unilaterally making certain decisions concerning a child without agreement of
11 the other party or order of the court under certain circumstances; authorizing the
12 court to modify a child custody or visitation order or a legal decision–making or
13 parenting–time order under certain circumstances; specifying that a party’s proposal
14 to relocate the residence of the party or the child in a certain manner constitutes a
15 material change in circumstances for purposes of a modification of an order;
16 specifying the purposes of this Act; repealing certain provisions relating to the
17 relevancy of a disability of a party in a child custody or visitation proceeding; making
18 certain clarifying and conforming changes; defining certain terms; and generally
19 relating to child custody, visitation, legal decision making, and parenting time.

20 BY repealing

21 Article – Family Law

22 Section 5–203(d) and 9–107

23 Annotated Code of Maryland

24 (2019 Replacement Volume and 2020 Supplement)

EXPLANATION: CAPITALS INDICATE MATTER ADDED TO EXISTING LAW.

[Brackets] indicate matter deleted from existing law.

Underlining indicates amendments to bill.

~~Strike out~~ indicates matter stricken from the bill by amendment or deleted from the law by amendment.



1 BY adding to
2 Article – Family Law
3 Section 9–101 and 9–103 to be under the amended subtitle “Subtitle 1. Definitions;
4 General Provisions” and the amended title “Title 9. Custodial Arrangements
5 for Children”; and 9–201 through 9–204 to be under the new subtitle “Subtitle
6 2. Legal Decision Making and Parental Responsibility – Judicial
7 Determinations”
8 Annotated Code of Maryland
9 (2019 Replacement Volume and 2020 Supplement)

10 BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,
11 Article – Family Law
12 Section 9–101, 9–101.1, 9–101.2, 9–103, 9–104, 9–105, 9–106, and 9–108
13 Annotated Code of Maryland
14 (2019 Replacement Volume and 2020 Supplement)

15 SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND,
16 That the Laws of Maryland read as follows:

17 **Article – Family Law**

18 5–203.

19 [(d) (1) If the parents live apart, a court may award custody of a minor child to
20 either parent or joint custody to both parents.

21 (2) Neither parent is presumed to have any right to custody that is superior
22 to the right of the other parent.]

23 Title 9. [Child Custody and Visitation] **CUSTODIAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR CHILDREN.**

24 Subtitle 1. [In General] **DEFINITIONS; GENERAL PROVISIONS.**

25 **9–101.**

26 (A) IN THIS TITLE THE FOLLOWING WORDS HAVE THE MEANINGS
27 INDICATED.

28 (B) “CHILD” MEANS AN INDIVIDUAL UNDER THE AGE OF 18 YEARS.

29 (C) (1) “LEGAL DECISION MAKING” MEANS THE RIGHT AND OBLIGATION
30 TO MAKE MAJOR LONG–TERM DECISIONS INVOLVING MEDICAL CARE, MENTAL
31 HEALTH, EDUCATION, RELIGIOUS TRAINING, EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES, AND
32 OTHER MATTERS OF MAJOR SIGNIFICANCE CONCERNING THE CHILD’S LIFE AND
33 WELFARE.

1 (2) “LEGAL DECISION MAKING” IS ALSO KNOWN AS LEGAL CUSTODY.

2 (D) (1) “PARENTING TIME” MEANS:

3 (I) THE TIME THE CHILD IS IN A PARENT’S CARE ACCORDING TO
4 AN AGREEMENT OR A COURT-ORDERED SCHEDULE; AND

5 (II) THE RIGHT AND OBLIGATION OF A PARENT TO PROVIDE A
6 HOME FOR THE CHILD, ADDRESS THE CHILD’S NEEDS, AND MAKE THE DAY-TO-DAY
7 DECISIONS REQUIRED DURING THE TIME THE CHILD IS WITH THAT PARENT.

8 (2) “PARENTING TIME” IS ALSO KNOWN AS PHYSICAL CUSTODY,
9 VISITATION, OR ACCESS.

10 **9-103.**

11 (A) IF THE PARENTS LIVE APART, A COURT MAY AWARD LEGAL DECISION
12 MAKING OR PARENTING TIME TO EITHER PARENT OR JOINTLY TO BOTH PARENTS.

13 (B) NEITHER PARENT IS PRESUMED TO HAVE ANY RIGHT TO LEGAL
14 DECISION MAKING OR PARENTING TIME THAT IS SUPERIOR TO THE RIGHT OF THE
15 OTHER PARENT.

16 **[9-101.] 9-104.**

17 (a) In any [custody or visitation] LEGAL DECISION-MAKING OR
18 PARENTING-TIME proceeding, if the court has reasonable grounds to believe that a child
19 has been abused or neglected by a party to the proceeding, the court shall determine
20 whether abuse or neglect is likely to occur if [custody or visitation] LEGAL
21 DECISION-MAKING OR PARENTING-TIME rights are granted to the party.

22 (b) Unless the court specifically finds that there is no likelihood of further child
23 abuse or neglect by the party, the court shall deny [custody or visitation] LEGAL
24 DECISION-MAKING OR PARENTING-TIME rights to that party, except that the court may
25 approve a supervised [visitation] PARENTING-TIME arrangement that assures the safety
26 and the physiological, psychological, and emotional well-being of the child.

27 **[9-101.1.] 9-105.**

28 (a) In this section, “abuse” has the meaning stated in § 4-501 of this article.

29 (b) In a [custody or visitation] LEGAL DECISION-MAKING OR
30 PARENTING-TIME proceeding, the court shall consider[, when deciding custody or
31 visitation issues,] evidence of abuse by a party against:

- 1 (1) the other parent of the party's child;
- 2 (2) the party's spouse; or
- 3 (3) any child residing within the party's household, including a child other
4 than the child who is the subject of the [custody or visitation] proceeding.

5 (c) If the court finds that a party has committed abuse against the other parent
6 of the party's child, the party's spouse, or any child residing within the party's household,
7 the court shall make arrangements for [custody or visitation] **LEGAL DECISION MAKING**
8 **OR PARENTING TIME** that best protect:

- 9 (1) the child who is the subject of the proceeding; and
- 10 (2) the victim of the abuse.

11 **[9-101.2.] 9-106.**

12 (a) Except as provided in subsection (b) of this section, unless good cause for the
13 award of [custody or visitation] **LEGAL DECISION MAKING OR PARENTING TIME** is
14 shown by clear and convincing evidence, a court may not award [custody of a child or
15 visitation with a child] **LEGAL DECISION MAKING OR PARENTING TIME**:

- 16 (1) to a parent who has been found by a court of this State to be guilty of
17 first degree or second degree murder of the other parent of the child, another child of the
18 parent, or any family member residing in the household of either parent of the child; or
- 19 (2) to a parent who has been found by a court of any state or of the United
20 States to be guilty of a crime that, if committed in this State, would be first degree murder
21 or second degree murder of the other parent of the child, another child of the parent, or any
22 family member residing in the household of either parent of the child.

23 (b) If it is in the best interest of the child, the court may approve a supervised
24 [visitation] **PARENTING-TIME** arrangement that assures the safety and the physiological,
25 psychological, and emotional well-being of the child.

26 **[9-103.] 9-107.**

27 (a) A child who is 16 years old or older and who is subject to a custody order or
28 decree **OR A LEGAL DECISION-MAKING OR PARENTING-TIME ORDER OR DECREE** may
29 file a petition to change custody **OR LEGAL DECISION MAKING OR PARENTING TIME**.

30 (b) A petitioner under this section may file the proceeding in the petitioner's own
31 name and need not proceed by guardian or next friend.

1 (c) Notwithstanding any other provision of this article, if a petitioner under this
2 section petitions a court to amend a custody order or decree **OR A LEGAL**
3 **DECISION-MAKING OR PARENTING-TIME ORDER OR DECREE**, the court:

4 (1) shall hold a hearing; and

5 (2) may amend the order or decree and [place the child in the custody of]
6 **GRANT LEGAL DECISION MAKING OR PARENTING TIME TO** the parent designated by
7 the child.

8 [9-104.] **9-108.**

9 Unless otherwise ordered by a court, access to medical, dental, and educational
10 records concerning the child may not be denied to a parent [because the parent does not
11 have physical custody of the child].

12 [9-105.] **9-109.**

13 [In any custody or visitation proceeding, if] **IF** the court determines that a party to
14 a custody or visitation order **OR LEGAL DECISION-MAKING OR PARENTING-TIME**
15 **ORDER** has unjustifiably denied or interfered with [visitation] **THE RIGHTS** granted by [a
16 custody or visitation] **THE** order, the court may, in addition to any other remedy available
17 to the court and in a manner consistent with the best interests of the child, take any or all
18 of the following actions:

19 (1) order that the [visitation] **PARENTING TIME** be rescheduled;

20 (2) modify the custody or visitation **OR LEGAL DECISION-MAKING OR**
21 **PARENTING-TIME** order to require additional terms or conditions designed to ensure
22 future compliance with the order; or

23 (3) assess costs or counsel fees against the party who has unjustifiably
24 denied or interfered with [visitation] **PARENTING-TIME** rights.

25 [9-106.] **9-110.**

26 (a) (1) Except as provided in subsection (b) of this section, in any [custody or
27 visitation] **LEGAL DECISION-MAKING OR PARENTING-TIME** proceeding the court [may]
28 **SHALL** include as a condition of a [custody or visitation] **LEGAL DECISION-MAKING OR**
29 **PARENTING-TIME** order a requirement that either party provide advance written notice
30 of at least 90 days to the court, the other party, or both, of the intent to relocate the
31 permanent residence of the party or the child either within or outside the State.

32 (2) The court may prescribe the form and content of the notice requirement.

1 (3) If the court orders that notice be given to the other party, a mailing of
2 the notice by certified mail, return receipt requested, to the last known address of the other
3 party shall be deemed sufficient to comply with the notice requirement.

4 (4) If either party files a petition regarding a proposed relocation within 20
5 days of the written notice of the relocation required by paragraph (1) of this subsection, the
6 court shall set a hearing on the petition on an expedited basis.

7 (b) On a showing that notice would expose the child or either party to abuse as
8 defined in § 4–501 of this article or for any other good cause the court shall waive the notice
9 required by this section.

10 (c) If either party is required to relocate in less than the 90–day period specified
11 in the notice requirement, the court may consider as a defense to any action brought for a
12 violation of the notice requirement that:

13 (1) relocation was necessary due to financial or other extenuating
14 circumstances; and

15 (2) the required notice was given within a reasonable time after learning
16 of the necessity to relocate.

17 (d) The court may consider any violation of the notice requirement as a factor in
18 determining the merits of any subsequent proceeding involving [custody or visitation]
19 **LEGAL DECISION MAKING OR PARENTING TIME.**

20 [9–107.

21 (a) (1) In this section the following words have the meanings indicated.

22 (2) (i) “Disability” means:

23 1. a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits
24 one or more of an individual’s major life activities;

25 2. a record of having a physical or mental impairment that
26 substantially limits one or more of an individual’s major life activities; or

27 3. being regarded as having a physical or mental impairment
28 that substantially limits one or more of an individual’s major life activities.

29 (ii) “Disability” shall be construed in accordance with the ADA
30 Amendments Act of 2008, P.L. 110–325.

31 (3) “Supportive parenting services” means services that may assist an
32 individual with a disability in the effective use of techniques and methods to enable the
33 individual to discharge the individual’s responsibilities to a child as successfully as an

1 individual who does not have a disability, including nonvisual techniques for individuals
2 who are blind.

3 (b) (1) In any custody or visitation proceeding, the disability of a party is
4 relevant only to the extent that the court finds, based on evidence in the record, that the
5 disability affects the best interest of the child.

6 (2) The party alleging that the disability of the other party affects the best
7 interest of the child bears the burden of proving that the disability of the other party affects
8 the best interest of the child.

9 (3) If the burden of proof is met, the party who has a disability shall have
10 the opportunity to prove that supportive parenting services would prevent a finding that
11 the disability affects the best interest of the child.

12 (4) If the court finds that the disability of a party affects the best interest
13 of the child and denies or limits custody or visitation, the court shall specifically state in
14 writing:

15 (i) the basis for the finding; and

16 (ii) the reason that the provision of supportive parenting services is
17 not a reasonable accommodation to prevent the finding.]

18 [9-108.] **9-111.**

19 (a) In this section:

20 (1) “deployment” means compliance with military orders received by a
21 member of the United States Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, National
22 Guard, or any other Reserve component to report for combat operations or other active
23 service for which the member is required to report unaccompanied by any family member
24 or that is classified by the member’s branch as remote; and

25 (2) “deployment” does not include National Guard or Reserve annual
26 training, inactive duty days, or drill weekends.

27 (b) Any order or modification of an existing child custody or visitation order **OR**
28 **LEGAL DECISION-MAKING OR PARENTING-TIME ORDER** issued by a court during a
29 term of a deployment of a parent shall specifically reference the deployment of the parent.

30 (c) (1) A parent who petitions the court for an order or modification of an
31 existing child custody or visitation order **OR LEGAL DECISION-MAKING OR**
32 **PARENTING-TIME ORDER** after returning from a deployment shall specifically reference
33 the date of the end of the deployment in the petition.

1 (2) (i) If the petition under paragraph (1) of this subsection is filed
 2 within 30 days after the end of the deployment of the parent, the court shall set a hearing
 3 on the petition on an expedited basis.

4 (ii) If the court finds that extenuating circumstances prohibited the
 5 filing of the petition within 30 days after the end of the deployment of the parent, the court
 6 may set a hearing on the petition on an expedited basis whenever the petition is filed.

7 (d) Any [custody or visitation] **LEGAL DECISION-MAKING OR**
 8 **PARENTING-TIME** order issued based on the deployment of a parent shall require that:

9 (1) the other parent reasonably accommodate the leave schedule of the
 10 parent who is subject to the deployment;

11 (2) the other parent facilitate opportunities for telephone and electronic
 12 mail contact between the parent who is subject to the deployment and the child during the
 13 period of deployment; and

14 (3) the parent who is subject to the deployment provide timely information
 15 regarding the parent's leave schedule to the other parent.

16 **SUBTITLE 2. LEGAL DECISION MAKING AND PARENTAL**
 17 **RESPONSIBILITY – JUDICIAL DETERMINATIONS.**

18 **9-201.**

19 **THE PURPOSES OF THIS SUBTITLE ARE TO:**

20 **(1) PROMOTE STABILITY AND LONG-TERM HEALTH AND WELFARE**
 21 **FOR CHILDREN BY:**

22 **(I) ENSURING THAT CHILDREN HAVE FREQUENT, REGULAR,**
 23 **CONTINUING, AND EXTENDED CONTACT WITH PARENTS WHO HAVE THE ABILITY TO**
 24 **ACT IN THE BEST INTEREST OF THEIR CHILDREN;**

25 **(II) CREATING FAMILY AND CASE-SPECIFIC PARENTING-TIME**
 26 **SCHEDULES FOR DAY-TO-DAY ACCESS, SHARED HOLIDAYS, VACATIONS, CULTURAL**
 27 **OR RELIGIOUS EVENTS, AND PARTICIPATION IN SPECIAL OCCASIONS WITH THE**
 28 **EXTENDED FAMILY OF EITHER PARENT;**

29 **(III) ENCOURAGING PARENTS TO SHARE IN THE RIGHTS AND**
 30 **RESPONSIBILITIES OF RAISING THEIR CHILDREN WHEN THE PARENTS DO NOT**
 31 **RESIDE TOGETHER; AND**

32 **(IV) FOSTERING CHILDREN'S RELATIONSHIPS WITH SIBLINGS**

1 AND WITH SIGNIFICANT ADULTS IN THE CHILDREN’S LIVES;

2 (2) PROVIDE CHILDREN WITH PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL SECURITY
3 AND PROTECTION FROM EXPOSURE TO CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE; AND

4 (3) PROVIDE FOR AN EXPEDITIOUS, THOUGHTFUL, AND CONSISTENT
5 PROCESS FOR DECISION MAKING BY COURTS TO PROTECT THE BEST INTEREST OF
6 CHILDREN.

7 9–202.

8 (A) SUBJECT TO THE PROVISIONS OF §§ 9–104, 9–105, AND 9–106 OF THIS
9 TITLE, IN DETERMINING WHAT LEGAL DECISION–MAKING AUTHORITY AND
10 PARENTING TIME IS IN THE BEST INTEREST OF THE CHILD, THE COURT MAY
11 CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING FACTORS:

12 (1) STABILITY AND THE FORESEEABLE HEALTH AND WELFARE OF THE
13 CHILD;

14 (2) FREQUENT, REGULAR, AND CONTINUING CONTACT WITH PARTIES
15 WHO CAN ACT IN THE CHILD’S BEST INTEREST;

16 (3) WHETHER AND HOW PARTIES WHO DO NOT LIVE TOGETHER WILL
17 SHARE THE RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF RAISING THE CHILD;

18 (4) THE CHILD’S RELATIONSHIP WITH EACH PARTY, ANY SIBLINGS,
19 OTHER RELATIVES, AND INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE OR MAY BECOME IMPORTANT IN THE
20 CHILD’S LIFE;

21 (5) THE CHILD’S PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL SECURITY AND
22 PROTECTION FROM CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE;

23 (6) THE CHILD’S DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS, INCLUDING PHYSICAL
24 SAFETY, EMOTIONAL SECURITY, POSITIVE SELF–IMAGE, INTERPERSONAL SKILLS,
25 AND INTELLECTUAL AND COGNITIVE GROWTH;

26 (7) THE DAY–TO–DAY NEEDS OF THE CHILD, INCLUDING EDUCATION,
27 SOCIALIZATION, CULTURE AND RELIGION, FOOD, SHELTER, CLOTHING, AND
28 MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH;

29 (8) HOW TO:

30 (I) PLACE THE CHILD’S NEEDS ABOVE THE PARTIES’ NEEDS;

1 (II) PROTECT THE CHILD FROM THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF ANY
2 CONFLICT BETWEEN THE PARTIES; AND

3 (III) MAINTAIN THE CHILD'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PARTIES,
4 SIBLINGS, OTHER RELATIVES, OR OTHER INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE OR LIKELY MAY
5 HAVE A SIGNIFICANT RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CHILD;

6 (9) THE AGE OF THE CHILD;

7 (10) ANY MILITARY DEPLOYMENT OF A PARTY AND ITS EFFECT, IF ANY,
8 ON THE PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP;

9 (11) ANY PRIOR COURT ORDERS OR AGREEMENTS;

10 (12) EACH PARTY'S ROLE AND TASKS RELATED TO THE CHILD AND
11 HOW, IF AT ALL, THOSE ROLES AND TASKS HAVE CHANGED;

12 (13) THE LOCATION OF EACH PARTY'S HOME AS IT RELATES TO THEIR
13 ABILITY TO COORDINATE PARENTING TIME, SCHOOL, AND ACTIVITIES;

14 (14) THE PARTIES' RELATIONSHIP WITH EACH OTHER, INCLUDING:

15 (I) HOW THEY COMMUNICATE WITH EACH OTHER;

16 (II) WHETHER THEY CAN CO-PARENT WITHOUT DISRUPTING
17 THE CHILD'S SOCIAL AND SCHOOL LIFE; AND

18 (III) HOW THE PARTIES WILL RESOLVE ANY DISPUTES IN THE
19 FUTURE WITHOUT THE NEED FOR COURT INTERVENTION;

20 (15) THE CHILD'S PREFERENCE, IF AGE-APPROPRIATE; AND

21 (16) ANY OTHER FACTOR THAT THE COURT CONSIDERS APPROPRIATE
22 IN DETERMINING HOW TO BEST SERVE THE PHYSICAL, DEVELOPMENTAL, AND
23 EMOTIONAL NEEDS OF THE CHILD.

24 (B) THE COURT SHALL ARTICULATE ITS FINDINGS OF FACT ON THE RECORD
25 OR IN A WRITTEN OPINION, INCLUDING:

26 ~~(1)~~ THE CONSIDERATION OF EACH FACTOR LISTED IN SUBSECTION
27 (A) OF THIS SECTION;

28 ~~(2)~~ ~~THE CONSIDERATION OF~~ AND ANY OTHER FACTOR THAT THE
29 COURT CONSIDERED; ~~AND~~

1 ~~(3) THE WEIGHT THE COURT GAVE TO EACH FACTOR THAT THE COURT~~
2 ~~CONSIDERED.~~

3 **9-203.**

4 (A) IF THE COURT DETERMINES THAT THE PARTIES ARE ABLE TO
5 COMMUNICATE AND REACH JOINT DECISIONS CONCERNING SOME OR ALL OF THE
6 CHILD'S NEEDS DESCRIBED IN § 9-202(A) OF THIS SUBTITLE, THE COURT MAY
7 AWARD:

8 (1) JOINT LEGAL DECISION MAKING TO BOTH PARTIES;

9 (2) JOINT LEGAL DECISION MAKING TO BOTH PARTIES, DESIGNATING
10 ONE PARTY TO MAKE FINAL DECISIONS IF THE PARTIES ARE UNABLE TO AGREE
11 AFTER A THOROUGH DISCUSSION OF THE ISSUES; OR

12 (3) JOINT LEGAL DECISION MAKING TO BOTH PARTIES, ALLOCATING
13 RESPONSIBILITY FOR SPECIFIC ISSUES TO EACH PARTY, IF THE PARTIES ARE
14 UNABLE TO AGREE AFTER A THOROUGH DISCUSSION OF THE ISSUES.

15 (B) IF THE COURT AWARDS JOINT LEGAL DECISION-MAKING AUTHORITY
16 UNDER SUBSECTION (A)(1) OF THIS SECTION, NEITHER PARTY, WITHOUT
17 AGREEMENT OF THE OTHER PARTY OR ORDER OF THE COURT, MAY UNILATERALLY
18 MAKE DECISIONS INVOLVING THE CHILD'S HEALTH, EDUCATION, RELIGION,
19 CULTURE, OR MEDICAL CARE OR ANY OTHER MATTER OF MAJOR SIGNIFICANCE
20 CONCERNING THE CHILD'S LIFE OR WELFARE.

21 **9-204.**

22 (A) THE COURT MAY MODIFY, IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PROVISIONS OF
23 THIS SUBTITLE, A CHILD CUSTODY OR VISITATION ORDER OR A LEGAL
24 DECISION-MAKING OR PARENTING-TIME ORDER IF THE COURT DETERMINES THAT
25 THERE HAS BEEN A MATERIAL CHANGE IN CIRCUMSTANCES SINCE THE ISSUANCE OF
26 THE ORDER THAT RELATES TO THE NEEDS OF THE CHILD OR THE ABILITY OF THE
27 PARTIES TO MEET THOSE NEEDS.

28 (B) A PARTY'S PROPOSAL TO RELOCATE THE RESIDENCE OF THE PARTY OR
29 THE CHILD IN A WAY THAT WOULD CAUSE PARENTING TIME TO BE IMPRACTICABLE
30 CONSTITUTES A MATERIAL CHANGE IN CIRCUMSTANCES.

31 SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect
32 October 1, 2021.