

Chapter 501

(House Bill 243)

AN ACT concerning

Family Law – Adoption of an Adult

FOR the purpose of limiting the requirement that a petitioner's spouse join in the petition for adoption to apply only when the prospective adoptee is a minor; authorizing a petitioner's spouse to join in the petition for adoption if the prospective adoptee is an adult; establishing that certain provisions of law requiring the issuance and service of a show-cause order on a prospective adoptee's parents do not apply if the prospective adoptee is an adult; authorizing a court to order, for good cause shown, certain investigations before ruling on certain adoption petitions involving a prospective adoptee who is an adult; establishing that parental consent to an adoption is not required if the prospective adoptee is an adult; and generally relating to the adoption of an adult.

BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,
Article – Family Law
Section 5–3B–13, 5–3B–15, 5–3B–16, and 5–3B–20
Annotated Code of Maryland
(2019 Replacement Volume and 2024 Supplement)

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

Article – Family Law

5–3B–13.

(a) Any adult or minor may be adopted under this subtitle.

(b) (1) Any adult may petition a court for adoption.

(2) If a petitioner is married **AND THE PROSPECTIVE ADOPTEE IS A MINOR**, the petitioner's spouse shall join in the petition unless the spouse:

(i) is separated from the petitioner under a circumstance that gives the petitioner a ground for annulment or divorce;

(ii) is not competent to join in the petition; or

(iii) 1. is a parent of the prospective adoptee; and

2. has consented to the adoption in accordance with this subtitle.

(3) IF THE PETITIONER IS MARRIED AND THE PROSPECTIVE ADOPTEE IS AN ADULT, THE PETITIONER’S SPOUSE MAY JOIN IN THE PETITION.

(c) Before a petition is filed under this subtitle, a petitioner shall move for, and a court shall order that, a case pending under Subtitle 3 of this title be closed.

(d) If the marital status of a petitioner changes before entry of an order under this subtitle, the petitioner shall amend the petition accordingly.

5–3B–15.

(a) **(1) THIS SECTION DOES NOT APPLY TO AN ADOPTION OF AN ADULT.**

(2) Subsection (b) of this section does not apply to an adoption by a spouse of the prospective adoptee’s parent or a relative of the prospective adoptee.

(b) A court shall issue a show–cause order that includes advice as to the parent’s rights to:

- (1) have independent counsel; and
- (2) receive adoption counseling and guidance.

(c) On issuance of a show–cause order as to a prospective adoptee, a petitioner shall serve the order:

- (1) on each of the prospective adoptee’s living parents who has not consented to the adoption; and
- (2) if the prospective adoptee is at least 10 years old and has not consented to the adoption, on the prospective adoptee.

(d) Service under this section shall be by:

- (1) personal service; or
- (2) certified mail, restricted delivery, return receipt requested.

(e) Service under this section shall be attempted at the parent’s last address known to the petitioner.

(f) (1) If a court is satisfied, by affidavit or testimony, that, after reasonable efforts in good faith, a petitioner could not identify a parent or could not effect service on a parent, the court shall order service through notice by publication as to that parent.

(2) Notice under this subsection shall consist of substantially the following statement:

To: (Father's name) To: (Mother's name) To: Unknown parent "You are hereby notified that an adoption case has been filed in the circuit court for (county name), case no. (number). All persons who believe themselves to be parents of a (male or female) child born on (date of birth) in (city, state) to (mother's and father's names and dates of birth) shall file a written response. A copy of the show-cause order may be obtained from the clerk's office at (address) and (telephone number). If you do not file a written objection by (deadline), you will have agreed to the permanent loss of your parental rights to this child."

(3) Service under this subsection shall be by:

(i) publication at least once in one or more newspapers in general circulation in the county where the petition is filed or, if different, where the parent's last address known to the petitioner is located; and

(ii) posting for at least 30 days on a website of the Department.

(4) The Department may charge a petitioner a reasonable fee to cover the cost of posting.

5-3B-16.

(a) Except as provided in § 5-3B-27 of this subtitle **AND SUBJECT TO SUBSECTION (C) OF THIS SECTION**, before ruling on a consensual adoption petition under [§ 5-3B-20(1)] **§ 5-3B-20(B)(1)** of this subtitle, a court may order a court investigator or child placement agency to conduct any investigation that the court considers necessary.

(b) [Before] **EXCEPT AS PROVIDED IN SUBSECTION (C) OF THIS SECTION, BEFORE** ruling on a nonconsensual adoption petition under [§§ 5-3B-20(2)] **§§ 5-3B-20(B)(2)** and 5-3B-22 of this subtitle, a court shall order a court investigator or an appropriate child placement agency to investigate and submit a report that includes summaries of:

(1) the prospective adoptee's emotional ties with and feelings toward the prospective adoptee's parents, the prospective adoptee's siblings, and others who may affect the prospective adoptee's best interests significantly; and

(2) the prospective adoptee's adjustment to:

(i) community;

(ii) home; and

(iii) school.

(C) IF A PROSPECTIVE ADOPTEE IS AN ADULT, THE COURT MAY ORDER AN INVESTIGATION UNDER SUBSECTION (A) OR (B) OF THIS SECTION ONLY FOR GOOD CAUSE SHOWN.

5–3B–20.

(A) THIS SECTION DOES NOT APPLY TO AN ADOPTION OF AN ADULT.

(B) A court may enter an order for adoption only if:

(1) (i) 1. each of the prospective adoptee’s living parents consents:

A. in writing; or

B. by failure to timely file notice of objection after being served with a show–cause order in accordance with this subtitle;

2. an administrative, executive, or judicial body of a state or other jurisdiction has granted a governmental unit or person other than a parent the power to consent to adoption, and the unit or person consents; or

3. parental rights have been terminated in compliance with the laws of a state or other jurisdiction, as described in § 5–3B–04 of this subtitle; and

(ii) if the prospective adoptee is at least 10 years old, the prospective adoptee consents; or

(2) in accordance with § 5–3B–22 of this subtitle, the court orders adoption without consent otherwise required under this section.

SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect October 1, 2025.

Approved by the Governor, May 13, 2025.