

PLEASE NOTE: Legislative Information **cannot** perform research, provide legal advice, or interpret Maine law. For legal assistance, please contact a qualified attorney.

An Act To Require Parenting Plans To Be Timely Filed

Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows:

Sec. 1. 19-A MRSA §1653, sub-§2, ¶D, as amended by PL 2009, c. 345, §1, is further amended to read:

D. The order of the court awarding parental rights and responsibilities must include the following:

(1) Allocated parental rights and responsibilities, shared parental rights and responsibilities or sole parental rights and responsibilities, according to the best interest of the child as provided in subsection 3. An award of shared parental rights and responsibilities may include either an allocation of the child's primary residential care to one parent and rights of parent-child contact to the other parent, or a sharing of the child's primary residential care by both parents. If either or both parents request an award of shared primary residential care and the court does not award shared primary residential care of the child, the court shall state in its decision the reasons why shared primary residential care is not in the best interest of the child;

(2) Conditions of parent-child contact in cases involving domestic abuse as provided in subsection 6;

(3) A provision for child support as provided in subsection 8 or a statement of the reasons for not ordering child support;

(4) A statement that each parent must have access to records and information pertaining to a minor child, including, but not limited to, medical, dental and school records and other information on school activities, whether or not the child resides with the parent, unless that access is found not to be in the best interest of the child or that access is found to be sought for the purpose of causing detriment to the other parent. If that access is not ordered, the court shall state in the order its reasons for denying that access;

(5) A statement that violation of the order may result in a finding of contempt and imposition of sanctions as provided in subsection 7;

(6) A statement of the definition of shared parental rights and responsibilities contained in section 1501, subsection 5, if the order of the court awards shared parental rights and responsibilities; and

~~(7) If the court appoints a parenting coordinator pursuant to section 1659, a parenting plan defining areas of parental rights and responsibilities within the scope of the parenting coordinator's authority.~~

(8) A parenting plan as required under section 1660.

An order modifying a previous order is not required to include provisions of the previous order that are not modified.

Sec. 2. 19-A MRSA §1660 is enacted to read:

§ 1660. Parenting plan

1. Parenting plan required. When issuing an order establishing or modifying parental rights and responsibilities, the court shall include in the order a parenting plan. When making a parenting plan, the court shall apply the standard of the best interest of the child as described in section 1653, subsection 3.

A. The court shall incorporate into a temporary order a temporary parenting plan that applies during the course of the litigation.

B. The court shall incorporate into the final parental rights and responsibilities order a permanent parenting plan.

2. Proposed parenting plans. Each party shall submit, either individually or jointly:

A. A temporary or permanent parenting plan prior to mediation; and

B. A permanent parenting plan prior to the pretrial conference or judicial settlement conference.

3. Contents of parenting plan. The parenting plan must include:

A. Allocation of residential contact, either sole, shared or allocated, and an explanation of the choice;

B. A schedule of parent-child contact that includes at least the following:

(1) Day-to-day contact, including rights of contact over the phone and by electronic means;

(2) Holiday contact, including Monday holidays, Easter, July 4th, Veteran's Day, Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day or other important cultural or religious holidays;

(3) School vacation contact, including winter break, February break, April break and summer school recesses; and

(4) Family holidays, reunions and the child's birthdays;

C. Allocation of decision-making authority, including a default method for conflict resolution in the areas of education; medical care, including mental health care; religion; discipline; and child care;

D. A process for resolving disputes without court action, which may include counseling, mediation or arbitration by a specified individual or agency, or court action;

E. A method for parental communication and what information needs to be communicated; and

F. A provision for how the plan will be revisited and how frequently.

SUMMARY

This bill establishes the requirement that courts incorporate a parenting plan into any order that addresses parental rights and responsibilities. Each party must submit a temporary or permanent parenting plan prior to mediation, or the parties may submit a temporary or permanent parenting plan jointly. The court shall incorporate a temporary parenting plan into any order issued during the parental rights and responsibilities litigation, and that parenting plan applies until a final order is issued. Each party must submit a permanent parenting plan prior to the pretrial conference or the judicial settlement conference, or the parties may submit a permanent parenting plan jointly. The court shall incorporate a permanent parenting plan into the final judgment.

The parenting plan must address each parent's specific responsibilities for the child, as well as establish both a decision-making mechanism and dispute resolution method for issues not specifically covered or about which the parents cannot agree.