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**SENATE BILL 6023**

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**State of Washington 66th Legislature 2019 Regular Session**

**By** Senators Zeiger, Wellman, Padden, Short, and Mullet

AN ACT Relating to parenting plans; amending RCW 26.09.002, 26.09.015, 26.09.187, 26.09.197, 26.09.260, and 2.56.180; and reenacting and amending RCW 26.09.004.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

**Sec.**  RCW 26.09.002 and 2007 c 496 s 101 are each amended to read as follows:

Parents have the responsibility to make decisions and perform other parental functions necessary for the care and growth of their minor children. In any proceeding between parents under this chapter, the best interests of the child shall be the standard by which the court determines and allocates the parties' parental responsibilities. The state recognizes the fundamental importance of the parent-child relationship to the welfare of the child, and that the relationship between the child and each parent ((~~should be fostered~~)) shall be protected unless inconsistent with the child's best interests. Residential time and financial support are equally important components of parenting arrangements. The best interests of the child are served by a parenting arrangement that best maintains a child's emotional growth, health and stability, and physical care. Further, the best interest of the child is ordinarily served when residential time is shared equally and when the existing pattern of interaction between a parent and child is altered only to the extent necessitated by the changed relationship of the parents, to facilitate equal residential time or as required to protect the child from physical, mental, or emotional harm.

**Sec.**  RCW 26.09.004 and 2009 c 502 s 1 are each reenacted and amended to read as follows:

The definitions in this section apply throughout this chapter.

(1) "Military duties potentially impacting parenting functions" means those obligations imposed, voluntarily or involuntarily, on a parent serving in the armed forces that may interfere with that parent's abilities to perform his or her parenting functions under a temporary or permanent parenting plan. Military duties potentially impacting parenting functions include, but are not limited to:

(a) "Deployment," which means the temporary transfer of a service member serving in an active‑duty status to another location in support of a military operation, to include any tour of duty classified by the member's branch of the armed forces as "remote" or "unaccompanied";

(b) "Activation" or "mobilization," which means the call‑up of a national guard or reserve service member to extended active‑duty status. For purposes of this definition, "mobilization" does not include national guard or reserve annual training, inactive duty days, or drill weekends; or

(c) "Temporary duty," which means the transfer of a service member from one military base or the service member's home to a different location, usually another base, for a limited period of time to accomplish training or to assist in the performance of a noncombat mission.

(2) "Parenting functions" means those aspects of the parent-child relationship in which the parent makes decisions and performs functions necessary for the care and growth of the child. Parenting functions include:

(a) Maintaining a loving, stable, consistent, and nurturing relationship with the child;

(b) Attending to the daily needs of the child, such as feeding, clothing, physical care and grooming, supervision, health care, and day care, and engaging in other activities which are appropriate to the developmental level of the child and that are within the social and economic circumstances of the particular family;

(c) Attending to adequate education for the child, including remedial or other education essential to the best interests of the child;

(d) Assisting the child in developing and maintaining appropriate interpersonal relationships;

(e) Exercising appropriate judgment regarding the child's welfare, consistent with the child's developmental level and the family's social and economic circumstances; and

(f) Providing for the financial support of the child.

(3) "Permanent parenting plan" means a plan for parenting the child, including allocation of parenting functions, which plan is incorporated in any final decree or decree of modification in an action for dissolution of marriage or domestic partnership, declaration of invalidity, or legal separation.

(4) "Substantial change in circumstances" includes, but is not limited to, a significant change or changes in the family unit, employment or permanent residential location of either party, a stated preference by a child that is mature enough to make a reasonable and independent preference, and other circumstances that serve the best interest of the child as described in RCW 26.09.002.

(5) "Temporary parenting plan" means a plan for parenting of the child pending final resolution of any action for dissolution of marriage or domestic partnership, declaration of invalidity, or legal separation which is incorporated in a temporary order.

**Sec.**  RCW 26.09.015 and 2008 c 6 s 1044 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) In any proceeding under this chapter, the matter may be set for mediation of the contested issues before or concurrent with the setting of the matter for hearing. The purpose of the mediation proceeding shall be to reduce acrimony which may exist between the parties and to develop an agreement assuring the child's close and continuing contact with both parents after the marriage or the domestic partnership is dissolved. The mediator shall use his or her best efforts to effect a settlement of the dispute.

(2)(a) Each superior court may make available a mediator. The court shall use the most cost-effective mediation services that are readily available unless there is good cause to access alternative providers. The mediator may be a member of the professional staff of a family court or mental health services agency, or may be any other person or agency designated by the court. In order to provide mediation services, the court is not required to institute a family court.

(b) In any proceeding involving issues relating to residential time or other matters governed by a parenting plan, the matter may be set for mediation of the contested issues before or concurrent with the setting of the matter for hearing. Counties may, and to the extent state funding is provided therefor counties shall, provide both predecree and postdecree mediation at reduced or waived fee to the parties within one year of the filing of the dissolution petition.

(3) Each superior court shall create and provide a mediation form that allows the parties to indicate the issue or issues on which mediation is being requested, the available times the parties are able to participate in mediation, and any issue or issues for which a party denies a request for mediation. A copy of the mediation form must be submitted to the court with the results of any mediation or upon filing a request for a court hearing.

(4)(a) Mediation proceedings under this chapter shall be governed in all respects by chapter 7.07 RCW, except as follows:

(i) Mediation communications in postdecree mediations mandated by a parenting plan are admissible in subsequent proceedings for the limited purpose of proving:

(A) Abuse, neglect, abandonment, exploitation, or unlawful harassment as defined in RCW 9A.46.020(1), of a child;

(B) Abuse or unlawful harassment as defined in RCW 9A.46.020(1), of a family or household member as defined in RCW 26.50.010((~~(2)~~)); or

(C) That a parent used or frustrated the dispute resolution process without good reason for purposes of RCW 26.09.184(4)(d).

(ii) If a postdecree mediation-arbitration proceeding is required pursuant to a parenting plan and the same person acts as both mediator and arbitrator, mediation communications in the mediation phase of such a proceeding may be admitted during the arbitration phase, and shall be admissible in the judicial review of such a proceeding under RCW 26.09.184(4)(e) to the extent necessary for such review to be effective.

(b) None of the exceptions under (a)(i) and (ii) of this subsection shall subject a mediator to compulsory process to testify except by court order for good cause shown, taking into consideration the need for the mediator's testimony and the interest in the mediator maintaining an appearance of impartiality. If a mediation communication is not privileged under (a)(i) of this subsection or that portion of (a)(ii) of this subsection pertaining to judicial review, only the portion of the communication necessary for the application of the exception may be admitted, and such admission of evidence shall not render any other mediation communication discoverable or admissible except as may be provided in chapter 7.07 RCW.

((~~(4)~~)) (5) The mediator shall assess the needs and interests of the child or children involved in the controversy and may interview the child or children if the mediator deems such interview appropriate or necessary.

((~~(5)~~)) (6) Any agreement reached by the parties as a result of mediation shall be reported to the court and to counsel for the parties by the mediator on the day set for mediation or any time thereafter designated by the court.

**Sec.**  RCW 26.09.187 and 2007 c 496 s 603 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) DISPUTE RESOLUTION PROCESS. The court shall not order a dispute resolution process, except court action, when it finds that any limiting factor under RCW 26.09.191 applies, or when it finds that either parent is unable to afford the cost of the proposed dispute resolution process. If a dispute resolution process is not precluded or limited, then in designating such a process the court shall consider all relevant factors, including:

(a) Differences between the parents that would substantially inhibit their effective participation in any designated process;

(b) The parents' wishes or agreements and, if the parents have entered into agreements, whether the agreements were made knowingly and voluntarily; ((~~and~~))

(c) Differences in the parents' financial circumstances that may affect their ability to participate fully in a given dispute resolution process; and

(d) Whether there are any issues for which mediation should not be required based on a party's unwillingness to engage in mediation on the issue or issues.

(2) ALLOCATION OF DECISION-MAKING AUTHORITY.

(a) AGREEMENTS BETWEEN THE PARTIES. The court shall approve agreements of the parties allocating decision-making authority, or specifying rules in the areas listed in RCW 26.09.184(5)(a), when it finds that:

(i) The agreement is consistent with any limitations on a parent's decision-making authority mandated by RCW 26.09.191; and

(ii) The agreement is knowing and voluntary.

(b) SOLE DECISION-MAKING AUTHORITY. The court shall order sole decision-making to one parent when it finds that:

(i) A limitation on the other parent's decision-making authority is mandated by RCW 26.09.191;

(ii) Both parents are opposed to mutual decision making;

(iii) One parent is opposed to mutual decision making, and such opposition is reasonable based on the criteria in (c) of this subsection; or

(iv) One parent knowingly and voluntarily agrees to concede decision-making authority to the other parent. The court shall verify that any voluntary concession of decision-making authority is of that parent's own volition.

(c) MUTUAL DECISION-MAKING AUTHORITY. Except as provided in (a) and (b) of this subsection, the court shall consider the following criteria in allocating decision-making authority:

(i) The existence of a limitation under RCW 26.09.191;

(ii) The history of participation of each parent in decision making in each of the areas in RCW 26.09.184(5)(a);

(iii) Whether ((~~the parents have~~)) each parent has a demonstrated ability, interest, and desire to cooperate with ((~~one another~~)) the other parent in decision making in each of the areas in RCW 26.09.184(5)(a); and

(iv) The parents' geographic proximity to one another, to the extent that it affects their ability to make timely mutual decisions.

(d) The court shall not presume that a parent, solely because of his or her sex or gender, is more or less qualified than the other parent to make decisions regarding the child's care, education, health care, and religious upbringing.

(e) The court shall enter written findings stating its reasons, including any facts and evidence considered to be true, supporting any finding that sole decision making is in the best interest of the child.

(3) RESIDENTIAL PROVISIONS.

(a) The court shall make residential provisions for each child which encourage each parent to maintain a loving, stable, and nurturing relationship with the child, consistent with the child's developmental level and the family's social and economic circumstances. The court shall not presume that a parent, solely because of his or her sex or gender, is more or less qualified than the other parent to engage in parenting functions or be provided with more or less residential time with the child. The child's residential schedule shall be consistent with RCW 26.09.191. Where the limitations of RCW 26.09.191 are not dispositive of the child's residential schedule, the court shall consider the following factors:

(i) The relative strength, nature, and stability of the child's relationship with each parent;

(ii) The agreements of the parties, provided they were entered into knowingly and voluntarily;

(iii) Each parent's past and potential for future performance of parenting functions as defined in RCW 26.09.004((~~(3)~~)), including whether a parent has taken greater responsibility for performing parenting functions relating to the daily needs of the child;

(iv) The emotional needs and developmental level of the child;

(v) The child's need for a frequent, continuing, and meaningful relationship with both parents and the ability and willingness of each parent to actively perform parent functions for the needs of the child;

(vi) The child's relationship with siblings and with other significant adults, as well as the child's involvement with his or her physical surroundings, school, or other significant activities;

((~~(vi)~~)) (vii) The wishes of the parents and the wishes of a child who is sufficiently mature to express reasoned and independent preferences as to his or her residential schedule; and

((~~(vii)~~)) (viii) Each parent's employment schedule, and shall make accommodations consistent with those schedules. A parent's employment schedule is not, by itself, a basis for limiting a parent's residential time with a child if the parent has other responsible persons approved by the court who can provide transportation or care for the child during schedule conflicts.

Factor (i) shall be given the greatest weight.

(b) ((~~Where the limitations of RCW 26.09.191 are not dispositive, the court may order that a child frequently alternate his or her residence between the households of the parents for brief and substantially equal intervals of time if such provision is in the best interests of the child. In determining whether such an arrangement is in the best interests of the child, the court may consider the parties geographic proximity to the extent necessary to ensure the ability to share performance of the parenting functions.~~

~~(c)~~)) There is a presumption that it is in the best interests of the child to establish an equal residential schedule that provides each parent with equal time and contact with the child unless:

(i) Factors present under RCW 26.09.191 require restrictions on the child's residential schedule; or

(ii) The parents have agreed on a parenting plan that allocates a greater share of residential time with one parent.

(c) A parent alleging that equal residential time and contact would not be in the best interest of the child has the burden of proof, which must be established by clear and convincing evidence.

(d) For parenting plans that involve a school-aged child, the court shall establish a residential schedule that provides consistency for the child through the school week.

(e) For any child, residential provisions may contain any reasonable terms or conditions that facilitate the orderly and meaningful exercise of residential time by a parent, including but not limited to requirements of reasonable notice when residential time will not occur.

(f) If the court does not enter a parenting plan providing for an equal residential schedule that provides each parent with equal time and contact with the child, the court shall enter written findings stating the reason or reasons, including the facts and evidence considered to be true that support the finding that an equal residential schedule is not in the best interest of the child.

(4) PERJURY. Any party who knowingly provides false information in their declarations or testimony regarding issues under the parenting plan is subject to prosecution for false swearing or perjury under chapter 9A.72 RCW.

**Sec.**  RCW 26.09.197 and 2007 c 496 s 604 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) After considering the affidavit required by RCW 26.09.194(1) and other relevant evidence presented, the court shall make a temporary parenting plan that is in the best interest of the child. In making this determination, the court shall give particular consideration to:

((~~(1)~~))(a) The presumption that it is in the best interest of the child to establish an equal residential schedule that provides each parent with equal time and contact with the child;

(b) The relative strength, nature, and stability of the child's relationship with each parent; and

((~~(2)~~)) (c) Which parenting arrangements will cause the least disruption to the child's emotional stability while the action is pending.

(2) The court shall also consider the factors used to determine residential provisions in the permanent parenting plan. The court shall enter written findings stating its reasons, including the facts and evidence considered to be true supporting any finding that the temporary parenting plan is in the best interest of the child. The court shall verify that any temporary parenting plan that is knowingly and voluntarily agreed upon by both parties is made of their own volition.

**Sec.**  RCW 26.09.260 and 2009 c 502 s 3 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) Except as otherwise provided in this subsection (1) or in subsections (4), (5), (6), (8), and (10) of this section, the court shall not modify a prior custody decree or a parenting plan unless it finds, upon the basis of facts that have arisen since the prior decree or plan or that were unknown to the court at the time of the prior decree or plan, that a substantial change ((~~has occurred~~)) in ((~~the~~)) circumstances ((~~of~~)), as defined in RCW 26.09.004, has occurred with the child or ((~~the nonmoving~~)) either party and that the modification is in the best interest of the child and is necessary to serve the best interests of the child as described in RCW 26.09.002. The effect of a parent's military duties or employment potentially impacting parenting functions or temporarily limiting their residential time shall not, by itself, be a substantial change of circumstances justifying a permanent modification of a prior decree or plan.

(2) In applying these standards, the court shall retain the residential schedule established by the decree or parenting plan unless:

(a) The parents agree to the modification;

(b) The child has been integrated into the family of the petitioner with the consent of the other parent in substantial deviation from the parenting plan;

(c) The child's present environment is detrimental to the child's physical, mental, or emotional health and the harm likely to be caused by a change of environment is outweighed by the advantage of a change to the child; ((~~or~~))

(d) The court finds that the nonmoving parent has demonstrated an inability or unwillingness to allow the child frequent and meaningful contact with the other parent based on the nonmoving parent's violation, without good cause, of one or more provisions of the residential schedule of the parenting plan; or

(e) The court has found the nonmoving parent in contempt of court at least twice within three years because the parent failed to comply with the residential time provisions in the court-ordered parenting plan, or the parent has been convicted of custodial interference in the first or second degree under RCW 9A.40.060 or 9A.40.070.

(3) A conviction of custodial interference in the first or second degree under RCW 9A.40.060 or 9A.40.070 shall constitute a substantial change of circumstances for the purposes of this section.

(4) The court may reduce or restrict contact between the child and the parent with whom the child does not reside a majority of the time if it finds that the reduction or restriction would serve and protect the best interests of the child using the criteria in RCW 26.09.191.

(5) The court may order adjustments to the residential aspects of a parenting plan upon a showing of a substantial change in circumstances of either parent or of the child, and without consideration of the factors set forth in subsection (2) of this section, if the proposed modification is only a minor modification in the residential schedule that does not change the residence the child is scheduled to reside in the majority of the time and:

(a) Does not exceed twenty-four full days in a calendar year; or

(b) Is based on a change of residence of the parent with whom the child does not reside the majority of the time or an involuntary change in work schedule by a parent which makes the residential schedule in the parenting plan impractical to follow; or

(c) Does not result in a schedule that exceeds ninety overnights per year in total, if the court finds that, at the time the petition for modification is filed, the decree of dissolution or parenting plan does not provide reasonable time with the parent with whom the child does not reside a majority of the time, and further, the court finds that it is in the best interests of the child to increase residential time with the parent in excess of the residential time period in (a) of this subsection. However, any motion under this subsection (5)(c) is subject to the factors established in subsection (2) of this section if the party bringing the petition has previously been granted a modification under this same subsection within twenty-four months of the current motion. Relief granted under this section shall not be the sole basis for adjusting or modifying child support.

(6) The court may order adjustments to the residential aspects of a parenting plan pursuant to a proceeding to permit or restrain a relocation of the child. The person objecting to the relocation of the child or the relocating person's proposed revised residential schedule may file a petition to modify the parenting plan, including a change of the residence in which the child resides the majority of the time, without a showing of adequate cause other than the proposed relocation itself. A hearing to determine adequate cause for modification shall not be required so long as the request for relocation of the child is being pursued. In making a determination of a modification pursuant to relocation of the child, the court shall first determine whether to permit or restrain the relocation of the child using the procedures and standards provided in RCW 26.09.405 through 26.09.560. Following that determination, the court shall determine what modification pursuant to relocation should be made, if any, to the parenting plan or custody order or visitation order.

(7) A parent with whom the child does not reside a majority of the time and whose residential time with the child is subject to limitations pursuant to RCW 26.09.191 (2) or (3) may not seek expansion of residential time under subsection (5)(c) of this section unless that parent demonstrates a substantial change in circumstances specifically related to the basis for the limitation.

(8)(a) If a parent with whom the child does not reside a majority of the time voluntarily fails to exercise residential time for an extended period, that is, one year or longer, the court upon proper motion may make adjustments to the parenting plan in keeping with the best interests of the minor child.

(b) For the purposes of determining whether the parent has failed to exercise residential time for one year or longer, the court may not count any time periods during which the parent did not exercise residential time due to the effect of the parent's military duties potentially impacting parenting functions.

(9) A parent with whom the child does not reside a majority of the time who is required by the existing parenting plan to complete evaluations, treatment, parenting, or other classes may not seek expansion of residential time under subsection (5)(c) of this section unless that parent has fully complied with such requirements.

(10) The court may order adjustments to any of the nonresidential aspects of a parenting plan upon a showing of a substantial change of circumstances of either parent or of a child, and the adjustment is in the best interest of the child. Adjustments ordered under this section may be made without consideration of the factors set forth in subsection (2) of this section.

(11) If the parent with whom the child resides a majority of the time receives temporary duty, deployment, activation, or mobilization orders from the military that involve moving a substantial distance away from the parent's residence or otherwise would have a material effect on the parent's ability to exercise parenting functions and primary placement responsibilities, then:

(a) Any temporary custody order for the child during the parent's absence shall end no later than ten days after the returning parent provides notice to the temporary custodian, but shall not impair the discretion of the court to conduct an expedited or emergency hearing for resolution of the child's residential placement upon return of the parent and within ten days of the filing of a motion alleging an immediate danger of irreparable harm to the child. If a motion alleging immediate danger has not been filed, the motion for an order restoring the previous residential schedule shall be granted; and

(b) The temporary duty, activation, mobilization, or deployment and the temporary disruption to the child's schedule shall not be a factor in a determination of change of circumstances if a motion is filed to transfer residential placement from the parent who is a military service member.

(12) If a parent receives military temporary duty, deployment, activation, or mobilization orders that involve moving a substantial distance away from the military parent's residence or otherwise have a material effect on the military parent's ability to exercise residential time or visitation rights, at the request of the military parent, the court may delegate the military parent's residential time or visitation rights, or a portion thereof, to a child's family member, including a stepparent, or another person other than a parent, with a close and substantial relationship to the minor child for the duration of the military parent's absence, if delegating residential time or visitation rights is in the child's best interest. The court may not permit the delegation of residential time or visitation rights to a person who would be subject to limitations on residential time under RCW 26.09.191. The parties shall attempt to resolve disputes regarding delegation of residential time or visitation rights through the dispute resolution process specified in their parenting plan, unless excused by the court for good cause shown. Such a court‑ordered temporary delegation of a military parent's residential time or visitation rights does not create separate rights to residential time or visitation for a person other than a parent.

(13) If the court finds that a motion to modify a prior decree or parenting plan has been brought in bad faith, the court shall assess the attorney's fees and court costs of the nonmoving parent against the moving party.

(14) A parent may petition for review and modification of a parenting plan entered prior to the effective date of this section based on the revised standards governing the establishment of parenting plans provided under this act. A petition for rehearing and modification of a parenting plan under this section must be filed by July 31, 2020, and must set forth the specific provisions of this act that warrant a review and modification of the parenting plan.

**Sec.**  RCW 2.56.180 and 2007 c 496 s 202 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) The administrative office of the courts shall create a handbook explaining the sections of Washington law pertaining to the rights and responsibilities of marital partners to each other and to any children during a marriage and a dissolution of marriage. The handbook may also be provided in videotape or other electronic form and must be made available and easily accessible on the administrative office of the courts' web site.

(2) The handbook created under subsection (1) of this section shall be provided by the county auditor when an individual applies for a marriage license under RCW 26.04.140.

(3) In a dissolution or legal separation action filed under this chapter, the petitioner's counsel shall provide to the petitioner a copy of the handbook created under subsection (1) of this section ((~~shall also be provided to the petitioner when~~)) at the time he or she files ((~~a~~)) the petition ((~~for dissolution, and to the respondent, unless the respondent did not file a response, notice of appearance, or any other paper in the case or did not appear in court~~)) and provide a copy of the handbook to be served along with the petition and summons upon the respondent. If the petitioner is unrepresented by counsel at the time the petition is filed, the court shall provide the petitioner with a copy of the handbook and direct that a copy of the handbook be served along with the petition and summons upon the respondent. The administrative office of the courts shall on an annual basis reimburse the counties for each copy of the handbook that is distributed by the court directly to family law parties under this section, provided that the county submits documentation of the number of handbooks distributed on an annual basis.

(4) The information contained in the handbook created under subsection (1) of this section shall be reviewed and updated annually. The handbook must contain the following information:

(a) Information on prenuptial agreements as contracts and as a means of structuring financial arrangements and other aspects of the marital relationship;

(b) Information on shared parental responsibility for children, including establishing a residential schedule for the child in the event of the dissolution of the marriage, and guidelines on what is included in the parenting plan in order to maximize to the highest degree the amount of time the child may spend with each parent;

(c) Information on notice requirements and standards for parental relocation;

(d) Information on child support for minor children;

(e) Information on property rights, including equitable distribution of assets and premarital and postmarital property rights;

(f) Information on spousal maintenance;

(g) Information on domestic violence, child abuse, and neglect, including penalties;

(h) Information on the court process for dissolution;

(i) Information on the effects of dissolution on children;

(j) Information on community resources that are available to separating or divorcing persons and their children.

**--- END ---**