

AN ACT

To enact section 3109.401 of the Revised Code to create the Task Force on Family Law and Children to study ways to improve existing processes regarding the parenting of children whose parents do not reside together and to submit a report of its findings and recommendations to the Speaker and Minority Leader of the House of Representatives and to the President and the Minority Leader of the Senate by December 31, 1999.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Ohio:

SECTION 1. That section 3109.401 of the Revised Code be enacted to read as follows:

Sec. 3109.401. (A) The general assembly finds the following:

(1) That the parent and child relationship is of fundamental importance to the welfare of a child, and that the relationship between a child and each parent should be fostered unless inconsistent with the child's best interests;

(2) That parents have the responsibility to make decisions and perform other parenting functions necessary for the care and growth of their children;

(3) That the courts, when allocating parenting functions and responsibilities with respect to the child in a divorce, dissolution, legal separation, annulment, or any other proceeding addressing the allocation of parental rights and responsibilities, must determine the child's best interests;

(4) That the courts and parents must take into consideration the following general principles when allocating parental rights and responsibilities and developing appropriate terms for parenting plans:

(a) Children are served by a parenting arrangement that best provides for a child's safety, emotional growth, health, stability, and physical care.

(b) Exposure of the child to harmful parental conflict should be minimized as much as possible.

(c) Whenever appropriate, parents should be encouraged to meet their responsibilities to their children through agreements rather than by relying on judicial intervention.

(d) When a parenting plan provides for mutual decision-making responsibility by the parents but they are unable to make decisions mutually, they should make a good faith effort to utilize the mediation process as required by the parenting plan.

(e) In apportioning between the parents the daily physical living arrangements of the child and the child's location during legal and school holidays, vacations, and days of special importance, a court should not impose any type of standard schedule unless a standard schedule meets the needs of the child better than any proposed alternative parenting plan.

(B) It is, therefore, the purpose of Chapter 3109. of the Revised Code, when it is in the child's best interest, to foster the relationship between the child and each parent when a court allocates parental rights and responsibilities with respect to the child in a divorce, dissolution, legal separation, annulment, or any other proceeding addressing the allocation of parental rights and responsibilities.

(C) There is hereby created the task force on family law and children consisting of twenty-four members. The Ohio state bar association shall appoint three members who shall be attorneys with extensive experience in the practice of family law. The Ohio association of domestic relations judges shall appoint three members who shall be domestic relations judges. The Ohio association of juvenile and family court judges shall appoint three members who shall be juvenile or family court judges. The chief justice of the supreme court shall appoint eight members, three of whom shall be persons who practice in the field of family law mediation, two of whom shall be persons who practice in the field of child psychology, one of whom shall be a person who represents parent and child advocacy organizations, one of whom shall be a person who provides parenting education services, and one of whom shall be a magistrate employed by a domestic relations or juvenile court. The speaker of the house of representatives shall appoint two members who shall be members of the house of representatives and who shall be from different political parties. The president of the senate shall appoint two members who shall be members of the senate and who shall be from different political parties. The governor shall appoint two members who shall represent child caring agencies. One member shall be the director of human services or the director's designee. The chief justice shall designate one member of the task force to chair the task force.

The appointing authorities and persons shall make initial appointments to the task force on family law and children within thirty days after the effective date of this section. Initial appointments to the task force shall be for terms ending July 1, 1999. Thereafter, terms of office shall be for two

years, with each term ending on the first day of July of the following odd-numbered year. Members who are members of the general assembly shall hold office until the end of the term for which the member was appointed or until the person ceases to be a member of the general assembly, whichever occurs first. The director of human services shall hold office until the director ceases to be director of human services. Each member shall hold office from the date of the person's appointment until the end of the term for which the member was appointed. Members may be reappointed. Vacancies shall be filled in the manner provided for original appointments. Any member appointed to fill a vacancy occurring prior to the expiration date of the term for which the member's predecessor was appointed shall hold office as a member for the remainder of that term. A member shall continue in office subsequent to the expiration date of the member's term until the member's successor takes office or until a period of sixty days has elapsed, whichever occurs first. Section 101.84 Of the Revised Code does not apply to the task force.

(D) The task force on family law and children shall do all of the following:

(1) Appoint and fix the compensation of any technical, professional, and clerical employees and perform any services that are necessary to carry out the powers and duties of the task force on family law and children. All employees of the task force shall serve at the pleasure of the task force.

(2) By December 31, 1999, submit to the speaker and minority leader of the house of representatives and to the president and the minority leader of the senate a report of its findings and recommendations on how to create a more civilized and constructive process for the parenting of children whose parents do not reside together. The recommendations shall propose a system to do all of the following:

(a) Put children first;

(b) Provide families with choices before they make a decision to obtain or finalize a divorce, dissolution, legal separation, or annulment;

(c) Redirect human services to intervention and prevention, rather than supporting the casualties of the current process;

(d) Avoid needless conflict between the participants;

(e) Encourage problem solving among the participants;

(f) Force the participants to act responsibly;

(g) Shield both the participants and their children from lasting emotional damage.

(3) Gather information on and study the current state of family law in this state;

(4) Collaborate and consult with entities engaged in family and children's issues including, but not limited to, the Ohio association of child caring agencies, the Ohio family court feasibility study, and the Ohio courts futures commission;

(5) Utilize findings and outcomes from pilot projects conducted by the Ohio family court feasibility study to explore alternatives in creating a more civilized and constructive process for the parenting of children whose parents do not reside together with an emphasis on the areas of mediation and obtaining visitation compliance.

(E) Courts of common pleas shall cooperate with the task force on family law and children in the performance of the task force's duties described in division (D) of this section.

Speaker _____ of the House of Representatives.

President _____ of the Senate.

Passed _____, 20____

Approved _____, 20____

Governor.

Am. Sub. S. B. No. 112

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The section numbering of law of a general and permanent nature is complete and in conformity with the Revised Code.

Director, Legislative Service Commission.

Filed in the office of the Secretary of State at Columbus, Ohio, on the
____ day of _____, A. D. 20____.

Secretary of State.

File No. _____ Effective Date _____