

Missouri UCCJA
Mo. Rev. Stat. § 452.440 et seq.

§ 452.440. Short title

Sections 452.440 to 452.550 may be cited as the "Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction Act".

§ 452.445. Definitions

As used in sections 452.440 to 452.550:

(1) "Custody determination" means a court decision and court orders and instructions providing for the custody of a child, including visitation rights. This term does not include a decision relating to child support or any other monetary obligation of any person; but the court shall have the right in any custody determination where jurisdiction is had pursuant to section 452.460 and where it is in the best interest of the child to adjudicate the issue of child support;

(2) "Custody proceeding" includes proceedings in which a custody determination is one of several issues, such as an action for dissolution of marriage, legal separation, separate maintenance, appointment of a guardian of the person, child neglect or abandonment, but excluding actions for violation of a state law or municipal ordinance;

(3) "Decree" or "custody decree" means a custody determination contained in a judicial decree or order made in a custody proceeding, and includes an initial decree and a modification decree;

(4) "Home state" means the state in which, immediately preceding the filing of custody proceeding, the child lived with his parents, a parent, an institution; or a person acting as parent, for at* least six consecutive months; or, in the case of a child less than six months old, the state in which the child lived from birth with any of the persons mentioned. Periods of temporary absence of any of the named persons are counted as part of the six-month or other period;

(5) "Initial decree" means the first custody decree concerning a particular child;

(6) "Litigant" means a person, including a parent, grandparent, or step-parent, who claims a right to custody or visitation with respect to a child.

§ 452.450. Jurisdiction

1. A court of this state which is competent to decide child custody matters has jurisdiction to make a child custody determination by initial or modification decree if:

(1) This state:

(a) Is the home state of the child at the time of commencement of the proceeding; or

(b) Had been the child's home state within six months before commencement of the proceeding and the child is absent from this state for any reason, and a parent or person acting as parent continues to live in this state; or

(2) It is in the best interest of the child that a court of this state assume jurisdiction because:

(a) The child and his parents, or the child and at least one litigant, have a significant connection with this state; and

(b) There is available in this state substantial evidence concerning the child's present or future care, protection, training, and personal relationships; or

(3) The child is physically present in this state and:

(a) The child has been abandoned; or

(b) It is necessary in an emergency to protect the child because he has been subjected to or threatened with mistreatment or abuse, or is otherwise being neglected; or

(4) It appears that no other state would have jurisdiction under prerequisites substantially in accordance with subdivision (1), (2), or (3), or another state has declined to exercise jurisdiction on the ground that this state is the more appropriate forum to determine the custody of the child, and it is in the best interest of the child that this court assume jurisdiction.

2. Except as provided in subdivisions (3) and (4) of subsection 1 of this section, physical presence of the child, or of the child and one of the litigants, in this state is not sufficient alone to confer jurisdiction on a court of this state to make a child custody determination.

3. Physical presence of the child, while desirable, is not a prerequisite for jurisdiction to determine his custody.

§ 452.455. Petition for modification--procedure -- child support delinquency, effect of

1. Any petition for modification of child custody decrees filed under the provisions of section 452.410, or sections 452.440 to 452.450, shall be verified and, if the original proceeding originated in the state of Missouri, shall be filed in that original case, but service shall be obtained and responsive pleadings may be filed as in any original proceeding.

2. Before making a decree under the provisions of section 452.410, or sections 452.440 to 452.450, the litigants, any parent whose parental rights have not been previously terminated, and any person who has physical custody of the child must be served in the manner provided by the rules of civil procedure and applicable court rules and may within thirty days after the date of service (forty-five days if service by publication) file a verified answer. If any of these persons is outside this state, notice and opportunity to be heard shall be given pursuant to section 452.460.

3. In any case in which the paternity of a child has been determined by a court of competent jurisdiction and where the noncustodial parent is delinquent in the payment of child support in an amount in excess of ten thousand dollars, the custodial parent shall have the right to petition a court of competent jurisdiction for the termination of the parental rights of the noncustodial parent.

4. When a person filing a petition for modification of a child custody decree owes past due child support to a custodial parent in an amount in excess of ten thousand dollars, such person shall post a bond in the amount of past due child support owed as ascertained by the division of child support enforcement or reasonable legal fees of the custodial parent, whichever is greater, before the filing of the petition. The court shall hold the bond in escrow until the modification proceedings pursuant to this section have been concluded wherein such bond shall be transmitted to the division of child support enforcement for disbursement to the custodial parent.

§ 452.460. Notice to persons outside this state--submission to jurisdiction

1. The notice required for the exercise of jurisdiction over a person outside this state shall be given in a manner reasonably calculated to give actual notice, and may be given in any of the following ways:

(1) By personal delivery outside this state in the manner prescribed for service of process within this state;

(2) In the manner prescribed by the law of the place in which the service is made for service of process in that place in an action in any of its courts of general jurisdiction;

(3) By certified or registered mail; or

(4) As directed by the court, including publication, if any other means of notification are ineffective.

2. Proof of service outside this state may be made by affidavit of the individual who made the service, or in the manner prescribed by the law of this state, the order pursuant to which the service is made, or the law of the place in which the service is made. If service is made by mail, proof of service may be a receipt signed by the addressee or other evidence of delivery to the addressee.

3. The notice provided for in this section is not required for a person who submits to the jurisdiction of the court.

§ 452.465. Simultaneous proceedings in other states

1. A court of this state shall not exercise its jurisdiction under sections 452.440 to 452.550 if, at the time of filing the petition, a proceeding concerning the custody of the child was pending in a court of another state exercising jurisdiction substantially in conformity with sections 452.440 to 452.550, unless the proceeding is stayed by the court of that other state for any reason.

2. Before hearing the petition in a custody proceeding, the court shall examine the pleadings and other information supplied by the parties under section 452.480 and shall consult the child custody registry established under section 452.515 concerning the pendency of proceedings with respect to the child in other states. If the court has reason to believe that proceedings may be pending in another state, it shall direct an inquiry to the state court administrator or other appropriate official of that state.

3. If the court is informed during the course of the proceeding that a proceeding concerning the custody of the child was pending in another state before the court assumed jurisdiction, it shall stay the proceeding and communicate with the court in which the other proceeding is pending in order that the issue may be litigated in the more appropriate forum and that information may be exchanged in accordance with sections 452.530 to 452.550. If a court of this state has made a custody decree before being informed of a pending proceeding in a court of another state, it shall immediately inform that court of the fact. If the court is informed that a proceeding was commenced in another state after it assumed jurisdiction, it shall likewise inform the other court in order that the issues may be litigated in the more appropriate forum.

§ 452.470. Inconvenient forum

1. A court which has jurisdiction under this act* to make an initial or modification decree may decline to exercise its jurisdiction any time before making a decree if it finds that it is an

inconvenient forum to make a custody determination under the circumstances of the case and that a court of another state is a more appropriate forum.

2. A finding that a court is an inconvenient forum under subsection 1 above may be made upon the court's own motion or upon the motion of a party or a guardian ad litem or other representative of the child. In determining if it is an inconvenient forum, the court shall consider if it is in the interest of the child that another state assume jurisdiction.

3. Before determining whether to decline or retain jurisdiction the court may communicate with a court of another state and exchange information pertinent to the assumption of jurisdiction by either court, with a view to assuring that jurisdiction will be exercised by the more appropriate court and that a forum will be available to the parties.

4. If the court finds that it is an inconvenient forum and that a court of another state is a more appropriate forum, it may dismiss the proceedings, or it may stay the proceedings upon condition that a custody proceeding be promptly commenced in another named state or upon any other conditions which may be just and proper, including the condition that a moving party stipulate his consent and submission to the jurisdiction of the other forum.

5. The court may decline to exercise its jurisdiction under this act* if a custody determination is incidental to an action for dissolution of marriage or another proceeding while retaining jurisdiction over the dissolution of marriage or other proceeding.

6. If it appears to the court that it is clearly an inappropriate forum, it may require the party who commenced the proceedings to pay, in addition to the costs of the proceedings in this state, necessary travel and other expenses, including attorneys' fees, incurred by other parties or their witnesses. Payment is to be made to the clerk of the court for remittance to the proper party.

7. Upon dismissal or stay of proceedings under this section, the court shall inform the court found to be the more appropriate forum of this fact or, if the court which would have jurisdiction in the other state is not certainly known, shall transmit the information to the court administrator or other appropriate official for forwarding to the appropriate court.

8. Any communication received from another state informing this state of a finding that a court of this state is the more appropriate forum shall be filed in the custody registry of the appropriate court. Upon assuming jurisdiction the court of this state shall inform the original court of this fact.

§ 452.475. Jurisdiction declined because of conduct

1. If the petitioner for an initial decree has wrongfully taken the child from another state or has engaged in similar reprehensible conduct, the court may decline to exercise jurisdiction if this is just and proper under the circumstances.

2. Unless required in the interest of the child, the court shall not exercise its jurisdiction to modify a custody decree of another state if the petitioner, without consent of the person entitled to custody, has improperly removed the child from the physical custody of the person entitled to custody or has improperly retained the child after a visit or other temporary relinquishment of physical custody. If the petitioner has violated any other provision of a custody decree of another state, the court may decline to exercise its jurisdiction if this is just and proper under the circumstances.

3. In appropriate cases a court dismissing a petition under this section may charge the petitioner with necessary travel and other expenses, including attorneys' fees, incurred by other parties or their witnesses.

§ 452.480. Information under oath to be submitted to the court

1. In his first pleading, or in an affidavit attached to that pleading, every party in a custody proceeding shall give information under oath as to the child's present address, with whom the child is presently living and with whom and where the child lived, other than on a temporary basis, within the past six months. In this pleading or affidavit every party shall further declare under oath whether:

(1) He has participated in any capacity in any other litigation concerning the custody of the same child in this or any other state;

(2) He has information of any custody proceeding concerning the child pending in a court of this or any other state; and

(3) He knows of any person not a party to the proceedings who has physical custody of the child or claims to have custody or visitation rights with respect to the child.

2. If the declaration as to any of the items listed in subdivisions (1) through (3) of subsection 1 above is in the affirmative, the declarant shall give additional information under oath as required by the court. The court may examine the parties under oath as to details of the information furnished and as to other matters pertinent to the court's jurisdiction and the disposition of the case.

3. Each party has a continuing duty to inform the court of any change in information required by subsection 1 of this section.

§ 452.485. Additional parties

If the court learns from information furnished by the parties pursuant to section 452.480 or from other sources that a person not a party to the custody proceeding has physical custody of the child or claims to have custody or visitation rights with respect to the child, it may order that person to be joined as a party and to be duly notified of the pendency of the proceeding and of his joinder as a party. If the person joined as a party is outside this state he shall be served with process or otherwise notified in accordance with section 452.460.

§ 452.490. Appearance of parties--child--guardian ad litem appointed, fee -- disqualification, when

1. The court may order any party to the proceeding who is in this state to appear personally before the court. If the court finds the physical presence of the child in court to be in the best interests of the child, the court may order that the party who has physical custody of the child appear personally with the child.

2. If a party to the proceeding whose presence is desired by the court is outside this state, with or without the child, the court may order that the notice given under section 452.460 include a statement directing that party to appear personally with or without the child.

3. If a party to the proceeding who is outside this state is directed to appear under subsection 1* of this section or desires to appear personally before the court with or without the child, the court may require another party to pay to the clerk of the court travel and other necessary expenses of the party so appearing and of the child, if this is just and proper under the circumstances.

4. If the court finds it to be in the best interest of the child that a guardian ad litem be appointed, the court may appoint a guardian ad litem for the child. The guardian ad litem so appointed shall be an attorney licensed to practice law in the state of Missouri. Disqualification of a guardian ad litem shall be ordered in any legal proceeding pursuant to chapter 210, RSMo, or this chapter, upon the filing of a written application by any party within ten days of appointment, or within ten days of August 28, 1998, if the appointment occurs prior to August 28, 1998. Each party shall be entitled to one disqualification of a guardian ad litem in each proceeding, except a party may be entitled to additional disqualifications of a guardian ad litem for good cause shown. The guardian ad litem may, for the purpose of determining custody of the child only, participate in the proceedings as if such guardian ad litem were a party. The court shall enter judgment allowing a reasonable fee to the guardian ad litem.

§ 452.495. Binding force and res judicata effect of custody decree

A custody decree rendered by a court of this state which had jurisdiction under section 452.450 binds all parties who have been served in this state or notified in accordance with section 452.460, or who have submitted to the jurisdiction of the court, and who have been given an opportunity to be heard. As to these parties the custody decree is conclusive as to all issues of law and fact decided and as to the custody determination made, unless and until that determination is modified pursuant to law, including the provisions of section 452.410 and sections 452.440 to 452.550.

§ 452.500. Recognition of out-of-state custody decrees

The courts of this state shall recognize and enforce an initial or modification decree of a court of another state which had assumed jurisdiction under statutory provisions substantially in accordance with sections 452.440 to 452.550, or which was made under factual circumstances meeting the jurisdictional standards of sections 452.440 to 452.550, so long as this decree has not been modified in accordance with jurisdictional standards substantially similar to those of sections 452.440 to 452.550.

§ 452.505. Modification of custody decree of another state

If a court of another state has made a custody decree, a court of this state shall not modify that decree unless it appears to the court of this state that the court which rendered the decree does

not now have jurisdiction under jurisdictional prerequisites substantially in accordance with sections 452.440 to 452.550 or has declined to assume jurisdiction to modify the decree and the court of this state has jurisdiction.

§ 452.510. Filing and enforcement of custody decree of another state

1. A certified copy of a custody decree of another state may be filed in the office of the clerk of any circuit court of this state. The clerk shall treat the decree in the same manner as a custody decree of the circuit court of this state. A custody decree so filed has the same effect and shall be enforced in like manner as a custody decree rendered by a court of this state.

2. A person violating a custody decree of another state which makes it necessary to enforce the decree in this state may be required to pay necessary travel and other expenses, including attorneys' fees, incurred by the party entitled to the custody or his witnesses.

§ 452.515. Registry of out-of-state custody decrees and proceedings

The clerk of each circuit court shall maintain a registry in which he shall enter the following:

- (1) Certified copies of custody decrees of other states received for filing;
- (2) Communications as to the pendency of custody proceedings in other states;
- (3) Communications concerning findings of inconvenient forum under section 452.470 by a court of another state; and
- (4) Other communications or documents concerning custody proceedings in another state which in the opinion of the circuit judge may affect the jurisdiction of a court of this state or the disposition to be made by it in a custody proceeding.

§ 452.520. Certified copies of custody decrees

The clerk of the circuit court of this state, at the request of the court of another state or at the request of any person who is affected by or has a legitimate interest in a custody decree, may, upon payment therefor, certify and forward a copy of the decree to that court or person.

§ 452.525. Taking testimony in another state

In addition to other procedural devices available to a party, any party to the proceeding or a guardian ad litem or other representative of the child may obtain the testimony of witnesses, including parties and the child, by deposition or otherwise, in another state. The court on its own motion may direct that the testimony of a person be taken in another state and may prescribe the manner in which and the terms upon which the testimony shall be taken.

§ 452.530. Hearings and studies in another state--orders to appear

1. A court of this state may request the appropriate court of another state to hold a hearing to obtain evidence, to order persons within that state to produce or give evidence under other procedures of that state, or to have social studies made with respect to the custody of a child involved in proceedings pending in the court of this state; and to forward to the court of this state certified copies of the transcript of the record of the hearing, the evidence otherwise obtained, or any social studies prepared in compliance with the request. The cost of the services may be assessed against the parties.

2. A court of this state may request the appropriate court of another state to order a party to custody proceedings pending in the court of this state to appear in the proceedings and, if that party has physical custody of the child, to appear with the child. The request may state that travel and other necessary expenses of the party and of the child whose appearance is desired will be assessed against the appropriate party.

§ 452.535. Assistance to courts of other states

1. Upon request of the court of another state, the courts of this state which are competent to hear custody matters may order a person in this state to appear at a hearing to obtain evidence or to produce or give evidence under other procedures available in this state for use in a custody proceeding in another state. A certified copy of the transcript of the record of the hearing or the evidence otherwise obtained may, in the discretion of the court and upon payment therefor, be forwarded to the requesting court.

2. A person within this state may voluntarily give his testimony or statement in this state for use in a custody proceeding outside this state.

3. Upon request of the court of another state, a competent court of this state may order a person in this state to appear alone or with the child in a custody proceeding in another state. The court may condition compliance with the request upon assurance by the other state that travel and other necessary expenses will be advanced or reimbursed.

§ 452.540. Preservation of documents for use in other states

In any custody proceeding in this state the court shall preserve the pleadings, orders and decrees, any record that has been made of its hearings, social studies, and other pertinent documents until the child reaches eighteen years of age. When requested by the court of another state the court may, upon payment therefor, forward to the other court certified copies of any or all of such documents.

§ 452.545. Request for court records of another state

If a custody decree has been rendered in another state concerning a child involved in a custody proceeding pending in a court of this state, the court of this state, upon taking jurisdiction of the case, shall request of the court of the other state a certified copy of the transcript of any court record and other documents mentioned in section 452.540.

§ 452.550. Priority

Upon the request of a party to a custody proceeding which raises a question of existence or exercise of jurisdiction under sections 452.440 to 452.550, determination of jurisdiction shall be given calendar priority and handled expeditiously.