

New Hampshire UCCJA
N.H. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 458-A:1 et seq.

§ 458-A:1. Purposes of Chapter; Construction of Provisions

I. The general purposes of this chapter are to:

(a) Avoid jurisdictional competition and conflict with courts of other states in matters of child custody which have in the past resulted in the shifting of children from state to state with harmful effects on their well-being;

(b) Promote cooperation with the courts of other states to the end that a custody decree is rendered in that state which can best decide the case in the interest of the child;

(c) Assure that litigation concerning the custody of a child take place ordinarily in the state with which the child and his family have the closest connection and where significant evidence concerning his care, protection, training, and personal relationships is most readily available, and that courts of this state decline the exercise of jurisdiction when the child and his family have a closer connection with another state;

(d) Discourage continuing controversies over child custody in the interest of greater stability of home environment and of secure family relationships for the child;

(e) Deter abductions and other unilateral removals of children undertaken to obtain custody awards;

(f) Avoid re-litigation of custody decisions of other states in this state insofar as feasible;

(g) Facilitate the enforcement of custody decrees of other states;

(h) Promote and expand the exchange of information and other forms of mutual assistance between the courts of this state and those of other states concerned with the same child;

(i) Make uniform the law of those states which enact it.

II. This chapter shall be construed to promote the general purposes stated in this section.

§ 458-A:2. Definitions

In this chapter:

I. "Contestant" means a person, including a parent, who claims a right to custody or visitation rights with respect to a child.

II. "Custody determination" means a court decision and court orders and instructions providing for the temporary or permanent custody of a child, including visitation rights.

III. "Custody proceeding" includes proceedings in which a custody determination is at issue or is one of several issues, including any action or proceeding brought to annul a marriage or to declare the nullity of a void marriage, or for a separation, or for a divorce, or relative to the guardianship of a minor, but not including proceedings for adoption, child protective proceedings or proceedings for permanent termination of parental custody, or proceedings involving the guardianship and custody of children found to be neglected or dependent pursuant to RSA 169-B, 169-C, or 169-D.

IV. "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.

V. "Home state" means the state in which the child at the time of the commencement of the custody proceeding has resided with his parents, a parent, or a person acting as parent, for at least 6 consecutive months. In the case of a child less than 6 months old at the time of the commencement of the proceeding, "home state" means the state in which the child has resided with any of such persons for a majority of the time since birth.

VI. "Initial decree" means the first custody decree concerning a particular child.

VII. "Modification decree" means a custody decree which modifies or replaces a prior decree, whether made by the court which rendered the prior decree or by another court.

VIII. "Physical custody" means actual possession and control of a child.

IX. "Person acting as parent" means a person, other than a parent, who has physical custody of a child and who has either been awarded custody by a court or claims a right to custody.

X. "State" means any state, territory or possession of the United States, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia.

§ 458-A:3. Jurisdiction to Make Child Custody Determinations

I. 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 only when:

(a) This state (1) is the home state of the child at the time of commencement of the custody proceeding; or (2) has been the child's home state within 6 months before commencement of such proceeding and the child is absent from this state because of his removal or retention by a person claiming his custody or for other reasons, and a parent or person acting as parent continues to live in this state; or

(b) It is in the best interest of the child that a court of this state assume jurisdiction because (1) the child and his parents, or the child and at least one contestant, have a significant connection with this state, and (2) there is within the jurisdiction of the court substantial evidence concerning the child's present or future care, protection, training, and personal relationships; or

(c) The child is physically present in this state and (1) the child has been abandoned or (2) it is necessary in an emergency to protect the child; or

(d) (1) It appears that no other state would have jurisdiction under prerequisites substantially in accordance with subparagraph (a), (b), or (c), 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 (2) it is in the best interest of the child that this court assume jurisdiction.

II. Except under subparagraphs I(c) and (d), physical presence in this state of the child, or of the child and one of the contestants, is not alone sufficient to confer jurisdiction on a court of this state to make a child custody determination.

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

§ 458-A:4. Notice and Opportunity to Be Heard

Before making a decree under this chapter, reasonable notice and opportunity to be heard shall be given to the contestants, any parent whose parental rights have not been previously

terminated, and any person who has physical custody of the child. If any of these persons is outside the state, notice and opportunity to be heard shall be given pursuant to RSA 458-A:5. Any person who is given notice and an opportunity to be heard pursuant to this section shall be deemed a party to the proceeding for all purposes under this chapter.

§ 458-A:5. Notice to Persons Outside the State

I. If a person cannot be personally served with notice within the state, the court shall require that such person be served in a manner reasonably calculated to give actual notice, as follows:

- (a) By personal delivery outside the state in the manner prescribed in RSA 510;
- (b) By any form of mail addressed to the person and requesting a receipt; or
- (c) In such manner as the court, upon motion, directs, including publication, if service is impracticable under subparagraph I(a) or (b).

II. Notice under this section shall be served, mailed, delivered, or last published at least 20 days before any hearing in this state.

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

IV. Notice is not required if a person submits to the jurisdiction of the court.

§ 458-A:5-a. Emergencies; Ex Parte Relief

I. Emergency orders may be granted without written or oral notice to the adverse party only if it clearly appears to the court, from specific facts shown by affidavit or by the verified petition, that immediate and irreparable injury, loss, or damage will result to the applicant, the children, or property before the adverse party or attorney can be heard in opposition.

II. No ex parte order shall be granted without:

(a) An affidavit from the moving party verifying the notice given to the other party or verifying the attempt to notify the other party.

(b) A determination by the court that such notice or attempt at notice was timely so as to afford the other party an opportunity to be present.

III. If temporary orders are made ex parte, the party against whom the orders are issued may file a written request with the clerk of the superior court and request a hearing thereon. Such a hearing shall be held no later than 5 days after the request is received by the clerk for the county in which the custody proceeding is filed.

§ 458-A:6. Simultaneous Proceedings in Other States

I. A court of this state shall not exercise its jurisdiction under this chapter 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 this chapter, unless the

proceeding is stayed by the court of the other state because this state is a more appropriate forum or for other reasons.

II. Before hearing the petition in a custody proceeding, the court shall examine the pleadings and other information supplied by the parties under RSA 458-A:9. 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 the other state.

III. 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 to the end that the issue may be litigated in the more appropriate forum and that information be exchanged in accordance with RSA 458-A:18-21. 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 to the end that the issues may be litigated in the more appropriate forum.

§ 458-A:7. Inconvenient Forum

I. A court which has jurisdiction under this chapter 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.

II. A finding of inconvenient forum may be made upon the court's own motion or upon motion of a party or a guardian ad litem or other representative of the child.

III. 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. For this purpose it may take into account the following factors, among others, whether:

(a) Another state is or recently was the child's home state;

(b) Another state has a closer connection with the child and his family or with the child and one or more of the contestants;

(c) Substantial evidence concerning the child's present or future care, protection, training, and personal relationships is more readily available in another state;

(d) The parties have agreed on another forum which is no less appropriate;

(e) The exercise of jurisdiction by a court of this state would contravene any of the purposes stated in RSA 458-A:1.

IV. 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.

V. 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.

VI. Where the court has jurisdiction of an action or proceeding brought to annul a marriage or to declare the nullity of a void marriage or for a separation or for a divorce, the court may decline to exercise jurisdiction of an application for a custody determination made therein while retaining jurisdiction of the matrimonial action.

VII. 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 attorney's fees, incurred by other parties or their witnesses. Payment shall be made to the clerk of the court for remittance to the proper party.

VIII. Upon dismissal or stay of proceedings under this section, the court shall inform the court found to be the more appropriate forum of such dismissal or stay, 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.

IX. Any communication received from another state to the effect that its courts have made a finding of inconvenient forum because a court of this state is the more appropriate forum shall be filed with the clerk of the appropriate court. Upon assuming jurisdiction the court of this state shall inform the original court of this fact.

§ 458-A:8. Jurisdiction Declined Because of Conduct

I. 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.

II. 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.

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

§ 458-A:9. Pleadings and Affidavits; Duty to Inform Court

I. Except as provided in paragraph IV, every party to a custody proceeding shall, in his first pleading or in an affidavit attached to that pleading, give information under oath as to the child's present address, the places where the child has lived within the last 5 years, and the names and present addresses of the persons with whom the child has lived during that period. In this pleading or affidavit every party shall further declare under oath whether he:

(a) Has participated as a party, witness, or in any other capacity in any other litigation concerning the custody of the same child in this or any other state;

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

(c) 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.

II. If the declaration as to any of the above items 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.

III. If, during the pendency of a custody proceeding, any party learns of another custody proceeding concerning the child in this or another state, he shall immediately inform the court of this fact.

IV. In an action for divorce or separation or to annul a marriage or to declare the nullity of a void marriage, where neither party is in default in appearance or pleading and the issue of custody is uncontested, the affidavit required by this section need not be submitted. In any other such action, such affidavit shall be submitted by the parties within 20 days after joinder of issue on the question of custody, or at the time application for a default judgment is made.

§ 458-A:10. Additional Parties

If the court learns from information furnished by the parties pursuant to RSA 458-A:9, 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 shall 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 RSA 458-A:5.

§ 458-A:11. Appearance of Parties and the Child

I. The court may order any party to the proceeding who is in the state to appear personally before the court. If that party has physical custody of the child, the court may order that he appear personally with the child.

II. If a party to the proceeding whose presence is desired by the court is outside the state with or without the child, the court may order that the notice given under RSA 458-A:5 include a statement directing that party to appear personally with or without the child and declaring that failure to appear may result in a decision adverse to that party.

III. If a party to the proceeding who is outside the state is directed to appear under paragraph II, 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.

§ 458-A:12. Force and Effect of Custody Decrees

A custody decree rendered by a court of this state which had jurisdiction under RSA 458-A:3 shall be binding upon all parties who have been personally served in this state or notified pursuant to RSA 458-A:5 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 this chapter.

§ 458-A:13. 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 this chapter or which was made under factual circumstances meeting the jurisdictional standards of this chapter, so long as the decree has not been modified in accordance with jurisdictional standards substantially similar to those of this chapter.

§ 458-A:14. Modification of Custody Decree of Another State

I. If a court of another state has made a custody decree, a court of this state shall not modify that decree unless (a) 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 this chapter or has declined to assume jurisdiction to modify the decree and (b) the court of this state has jurisdiction.

II. If a court of this state is authorized under paragraph I and RSA 458-A:8 to modify a custody decree of another state, it shall give due consideration to the transcript of the record and other documents of all previous proceedings submitted to it in accordance with RSA 458-A:21.

§ 458-A:15. Filing and Enforcement of Custody Decree of Another State

I. A certified copy of a custody decree of another state may be filed in the office of the clerk of the superior court. The clerk shall treat the decree in the same manner as a custody decree of the superior court. 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.

II. 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 attorney's fees, incurred by the party entitled to the custody or his witnesses.

§ 458-A:16. Certified Copies of Custody Decrees

The clerk of the superior court, at the request of the court of another state or, upon payment of the appropriate fees, if any, at the request of a party to the custody proceeding, the attorney for a party or a representative of the child shall certify and forward a copy of the decree to that court or person.

§ 458-A:17. Examination of Witnesses Outside the 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 examine witnesses, including parties and the child, in another state by deposition or otherwise in accordance with the applicable provisions of the RSA and rules of the superior court.

§ 458-A:18. Hearings and Studies in Another State; Orders to Appear

I. A court of this state may request the appropriate court of another state to hold a hearing to adduce evidence, to order a party 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 adduced, or any social studies prepared in compliance with the request. The cost of the services may be assessed against the parties.

II. 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 another party or will otherwise be paid.

§ 458-A:19. Assistance to Courts of Other States

I. Upon request of the court of another state, the courts of this state which are competent to hear custody matters may order a party or witness in this state to appear at an examination to be conducted in the same manner as if such person were a party to or witness in an action pending in the superior court. A certified copy of the deposition or the evidence otherwise adduced shall be forwarded by the clerk of the court to the court which requested it.

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

III. Upon request of the court of another state, a competent court of this state may order a person within the 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.

§ 458-A:20. Preservation of Evidence 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 21 years of age. Upon appropriate request of the court of another state, the court shall forward to the other court certified copies of any or all of such documents.

§ 458-A:21. Request for Court Records from 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 RSA 458-A:20.

§ 458-A:22. International Application

The general policies of this chapter extend to the international area. The provisions of this chapter relating to the recognition and enforcement of custody decrees of other states apply to custody decrees and decrees involving legal institutions similar in nature to custody institutions rendered by appropriate authorities of other nations if reasonable notice and opportunity to be heard were given to all affected persons.

§ 458-A:23. Priority

Upon the request of a party to a custody proceeding which raises a question of existence or exercise of jurisdiction under this chapter, the case shall be given calendar priority and handled expeditiously.

§ 458-A:24. Separability

If any part of this chapter or the application thereof to any person or circumstance is adjudged invalid by a court of competent jurisdiction, such judgment shall not affect or impair the validity of the remainder of such chapter or the application thereof to other persons and circumstances.

§ 458-A:25. Inconsistent Provisions of Other Laws Superseded

Insofar as the provisions of this chapter are inconsistent with the provisions of any other law, general, special or local, the provisions of this chapter shall be controlling.