

Vermont UCCJA

Vt. Stat. Ann. tit. 15, § 1031 et seq.

§ 1031. Definitions

For the purposes of this chapter unless the context otherwise clearly requires:

(1) "Contestant" means a person, including a parent, who claims a right to custody or visitation rights with respect to a child;

(2) "Custody determination" means a court decision and court orders and instructions providing for the custody of a child, including visitation rights; it does not include a decision relating to child support or any other monetary obligation of any person;

(3) "Custody proceeding" includes proceedings in which a custody determination is one of several issues, such as an action for divorce or separation, and includes child neglect and dependency proceedings;

(4) "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;

(5) "Home state" means the state in which the child immediately preceding the time involved lived with his parents, a parent, or a person acting as parent, for at least six consecutive months, and 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;

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

(7) "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;

(8) "Physical custody" means actual possession and control of a child;

(9) "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; and

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

§ 1032. Jurisdiction

(a) 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 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

(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 contestant, 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 neglected; or

(4) it appears that no other state would have jurisdiction under prerequisites substantially in accordance with subdivisions (1), (2), or (3) of this subsection, 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.

(b) 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, except under subdivisions (3) and (4) of subsection (a) of this section (and then only when the conditions in the subdivision are met).

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

§ 1033. 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 this state, notice and opportunity to be heard shall be given pursuant to section 1034 of this title.

§ 1034. Notice to persons outside this state; submission to jurisdiction

(a) Notice required for the exercise of jurisdiction over a person outside this state shall be given pursuant to the Vermont Rules of Civil Procedure.

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

§ 1035. Simultaneous proceedings in other states

(a) 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.

(b) Before hearing the petition in a custody proceeding the court shall examine the pleadings and other information supplied by the parties under section 1038 of this title and shall consult the child custody registry established under section 1044 of this title 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 the other state.

(c) 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 sections 1047-1050 of this title. 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.

§ 1036. Inconvenient or inappropriate forum

(a) 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.

(b) 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.

(c) 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:

- (1) if another state is or recently was the child's home state;
- (2) if another state has a closer connection with the child and his family or with the child and one or more of the contestants;
- (3) if substantial evidence concerning the child's present or future care, protection, training, and personal relationships is more readily available in another state;
- (4) if the parties have agreed on another forum which is no less appropriate; and
- (5) if the exercise of jurisdiction by a court of this state would contravene any of the purposes of this chapter.

(d) 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.

(e) 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.

(f) The court may decline to exercise its jurisdiction under this chapter if a custody determination is incidental to an action for divorce or another proceeding while retaining jurisdiction over the divorce or other proceeding.

(g) 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.

(h) 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.

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

§ 1037. Information under oath

(a) Every party in a custody proceeding in his first pleading or in an affidavit attached to that pleading shall give information under oath as to the child's present address, the places where the child has lived within the last five 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:

(1) he 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;

(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.

(b) 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.

(c) Each party has a continuing duty to inform the court of any custody proceeding concerning the child in this or any other state of which he obtained information during this proceeding.

§ 1038. Additional parties

If the court learns from information furnished by the parties pursuant to section 1037 of this title 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 section 1034 of this title.

§ 1039. Appearance of parties and the child

(a) The court may order any party to the proceeding who is in this 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.

(b) 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 1034 of this title 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.

(c) If a party to the proceeding who is outside this state is directed to appear under subsection (b) 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.

§ 1040. Binding force; res judicata effect of custody decree

A custody decree rendered by a court of this state which had jurisdiction under section 1032 of this title binds all parties who have been served in this state or notified in accordance with section 1034 of this title 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.

§ 1041. 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 the chapter so long as this decree has not been modified in accordance with jurisdictional standards substantially similar to those of this chapter.

§ 1042. Modification of custody decree of another place

(a) If a court of another state has made a custody decree, a court of this state shall not modify that decree; unless:

(1) 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

(2) the court of this state has jurisdiction.

(b) Unless required in the interest of the child, the court shall not 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.

(c) If a court of this state is authorized under subsections (a) or (b) of this section 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 section 1049 of this title.

§ 1043. Filing and enforcement of custody decree of another state

(a) A certified copy of a custody decree of another state may be filed in the office of the court administrator 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.

(b) 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.

§ 1044. Registry of out-of-state custody decrees and proceedings

The court administrator shall maintain a registry in which he shall enter the following:

- (1) certified copies of custody decrees of other states received for filing;
- (2) court documents as to the pendency of custody proceedings in other states;
- (3) court documents concerning a finding of inconvenient forum by a court of another state;

and

(4) court documents concerning custody proceedings in another state which may affect the jurisdiction of a court of this state or the disposition to be made by it in a custody proceeding.

§ 1045. Certified copies of custody decree

The court administrator or the clerk of the court of competent jurisdiction 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, shall certify and forward a copy of the decree to that court or person.

§ 1046. 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 adduce testimony of witnesses, including parties and the child, by deposition or otherwise, in another state.

§ 1047. Hearings and studies in another state; orders to appear

(a) A court of this state may request the appropriate court of another state to hold a hearing to adduce evidence and to forward to the court of this state certified copies of the transcript of the

record of the hearing and the evidence otherwise adduced. The cost of the services may be assessed against the parties, or if necessary, ordered paid by the state.

(b) 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.

§ 1048. Assistance to courts of other states

(a) 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 adduce evidence or to produce or give evidence under other procedures available in this state. A certified copy of the transcript of the record of the hearing or the evidence otherwise adduced shall be forwarded by the clerk of the court to the requesting court.

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

§ 1049. 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 18 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 such documents.

§ 1050. 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 1049 of this title.

§ 1051. 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 rendered by appropriate authorities of other nations if reasonable notice and opportunity to be heard were given to all affected persons.