

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SB 5348

As Reported by House Committee On:
Judiciary

Title: An act relating to the uniform child custody jurisdiction and enforcement act.

Brief Description: Updating the uniform child custody jurisdiction and enforcement act.

Sponsors: By Senators Costa, Long, Patterson, Kastama, Hargrove, Sheahan, McCaslin, Prentice, Kohl-Welles, Haugen, Kline, Johnson, Zarelli and Oke.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Judiciary: 3/23/01, 3/30/01 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Replaces the Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction Act with the Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction and Enforcement Act.
- Makes state law consistent with the federal law in determining jurisdiction of interstate child custody orders.
- Provides a process for enforcing other states' child custody orders.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Carrell, Republican Co-Chair; Lantz, Democratic Co-Chair; Hurst, Democratic Vice Chair; Lambert, Republican Vice Chair; Boldt, Casada, Dickerson, Esser, Lovick and McDermott.

Staff: Trudes Hutcheson (786-7384).

Background:

Child custody disputes can become complicated when the parties live in different states. The different courts must determine which state has jurisdiction over the matter and when another state can modify the original custody order.

In 1968, the National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws (NCCUSL) developed model statutes called the Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction Act (UCCJA), which was adopted by all 50 states.

In 1997, the NCCUSL revised the UCCJA and approved the new act, called the Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction and Enforcement Act (UCCJEA). At least 21 states have adopted the UCCJEA.

I. UCCJA

A. Jurisdiction

Under the UCCJA a state may obtain jurisdiction over a child custody dispute if any one of the four circumstances apply:

- (1) the state is the home state of the child at the time the custody proceeding was filed, and the child has resided in the state for the previous six consecutive months;
- (2) it is in the child's best interest because the child has significant connections with the state (more than just the physical presence of the child in the state is required);
- (3) the child is present in the state and has been abandoned or is in need of protection because of mistreatment, neglect, or abuse; or
- (4) no other state has jurisdiction, or another state declines jurisdiction.

The UCCJA does not explicitly state which of the four bases for jurisdiction should be favored. A state may decline jurisdiction if it is an inconvenient forum and another state would be a more appropriate forum. The court should consider the child's best interest and may take into account factors such as: if another state has become the child's home state; the child has closer connections with another state; evidence for the custody proceeding is more available in another state; or both parents have agreed on another forum.

A state may also decline to take jurisdiction if the person seeking jurisdiction in that state has taken the child there without permission or engaged in similar "reprehensible conduct."

B. Modification

A state may not modify another state's custody order unless:

- (1) the issuing state no longer has jurisdiction or declines to assume jurisdiction to modify the order, and
- (2) the state modifying the order meets the jurisdictional requirements for issuing an initial order.

Based on this strict standard of modification, there generally cannot be concurrent jurisdiction between states to modify an order.

C. Filing and Enforcing Foreign Custody Orders

A custody order issued from another state may be filed in the superior court of this state. The order is treated as if it were issued from this state and enforced in the same manner. An order from another state is not entitled to full faith and credit if the parties were not given reasonable notice and an opportunity to be heard.

II. Federal Parental Kidnapping Prevention Act (PKPA)

In 1980, Congress passed the PKPA, which was designed to work with the UCCJA. The PKPA requires states to recognize child custody orders from other states when the issuing state had jurisdiction based on the requirements of the PKPA. The PKPA jurisdictional requirements are similar to the UCCJA jurisdictional requirements, with a few exceptions.

Unlike the UCCJA, the PKPA places priority on the child's home state. The PKPA also authorizes continuing exclusive jurisdiction in the state that issued the initial order, so long as one parent or the child resides in that state and so long as that state has jurisdiction over the order under its own laws. When there are conflicts between the UCCJA and the PKPA, the federal act controls.

Summary of Bill:

The Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction Act (UCCJA) is repealed and replaced with the Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction and Enforcement Act (UCCJEA). The UCCJEA is similar to the UCCJA and retains many of the same provisions. The new act makes changes mainly in the jurisdiction provisions and in establishing enforcement provisions.

A. Jurisdiction

The jurisdictional provisions in the UCCJEA are made consistent with the PKPA. The UCCJEA gives priority of jurisdiction to the child's home state. Full faith and credit cannot be given to a custody order from a state with jurisdiction based on significant connection when there is a home state.

The UCCJEA establishes when a state has continuing exclusive jurisdiction over custody matters. The state that issued the initial order remains the state with continuing exclusive jurisdiction until: (1) the child, the child's parent, or any person acting as a parent, no longer has any significant connection with the state, and substantial evidence is no longer available regarding the child's care, protection, training, and personal relationships in that state; or (2) the child and the parents no longer reside in the issuing state.

A state may not modify a custody order issued by another state unless the issuing state no longer has continuing exclusive jurisdiction or declines jurisdiction.

When determining whether it is an inconvenient forum for jurisdiction, the state may consider such factors as whether domestic violence has occurred and which state could best protect the parties and the child.

B. Temporary Emergency Jurisdiction

A state's ability to obtain jurisdiction based on an emergency is clarified. The new act specifically allows a state to obtain jurisdiction temporarily when the child is present in the state and is abandoned or needs protection because the child, or a sibling, or parent is subjected to abuse. The emergency custody order lasts until an order is obtained from a state having jurisdiction over the custody proceedings. The emergency custody order may become a final order under limited circumstances.

C. Registration of the Custody Order and Enforcement

The UCCJEA establishes procedures for the enforcement of custody orders. A court must enforce a registered order as if it were issued in this state. When registering another state's custody order in this state, the registering court must send notice to the parties and provide the parties with an opportunity to contest the registration. A hearing to contest the registration must be requested within 20 days of the notice.

To seek expedited enforcement of an order, a party must file a petition with the court stating certain information. The court must issue an order requiring the respondent to appear in person, with or without the child, at a hearing on the next judicial day or the first available judicial day.

If the court finds that the petitioner has the right to take immediate custody of the child, the court must issue an order granting petitioner immediate custody. The court may not enforce the custody order if the respondent establishes that the custody order is not registered and that either the issuing court lacked jurisdiction, or the order has been vacated, stayed, or modified, or the respondent did not receive proper notice of the proceedings before the order was issued.

D. Miscellaneous Provisions

When courts in different states communicate with each other regarding custody proceedings, the courts must allow the parties to participate in the communication. The UCCJEA applies to child custody proceedings pertaining to an Indian child if the federal Indian Child Welfare Act does not apply. Courts must treat a tribe as if it were a state under the UCCJEA.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not Requested.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: The federal Parenting Kidnapping Prevention Act states that other states must enforce other states' custody orders if they meet the requirements in the UCCJEA and those requirements are not in the current UCCJA law. It's important for enforceability of our state's custody orders for the state to adopt the UCCJEA. Once a state has jurisdiction, it is important that it retain jurisdiction to protect the noncustodial parent who remains in that state even when the custodial parent moves away.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Rick Bartholomew, Washington State Bar Association, Family Law Section.