

SENATE BILL REPORT

2SHB 2346

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Judiciary, February 28, 2002

Title: An act relating to the uniform parentage act.

Brief Description: Updating the uniform parentage act.

Sponsors: House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Darneille, Delvin and Dickerson; by request of Uniform Legislation Commission).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Judiciary: 2/28/02 [DP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Kline, Chair; Kastama, Vice Chair; Costa, Hargrove, Long, McCaslin, Poulsen, Roach, Thibaudeau and Zarelli.

Staff: Lidia Mori (786-7755)

Background: The National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws develops and proposes laws in subject matters where it believes uniformity between states is desirable. In 1973 the commissioners approved the Uniform Parentage Act (UPA 1973), which has been enacted in at least 19 states, including Washington. The UPA 1973 created procedures to identify parentage so that child support may be established.

Presumption of Paternity. To determine the existence of a father/child relationship, the UPA 1973 creates a presumption of paternity. A man is presumed to be the father of a child if: (a) he and the child's mother are or were married, and the child is born during the marriage or within 300 days after the marriage ends; (b) before the child's birth, he and the child's mother have attempted to marry each other and the child is born within 300 days after the termination of cohabitation; (c) after the child's birth, he and the child's mother have married, or attempted to marry, and either he acknowledged his paternity in writing, or he consented to be named as the father on the birth certificate, or he is obligated to support the child under a written promise or court order; (d) he received the minor child into his home and openly treated the child as his own; (e) he signed a paternity affidavit or acknowledged paternity in writing; or (f) genetic testing shows a 98 percent or greater probability of paternity.

Under the Federal Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996 (the Welfare Reform Act), states must adopt certain nonjudicial procedures to establish paternity in order to receive federal funds. In response, Washington established the use of paternity affidavits which are filed with the registrar of vital statistics. Signing a paternity affidavit is equivalent to a legal finding of paternity if it is not rescinded or challenged within 60 days of filing it.

After 60 days, the affidavit may be challenged only on the basis of fraud, duress, or material mistake of fact.

Disestablishing Paternity. Any interested party, including the state, the child, the mother, or the man alleged to be the father, may bring an action at any time to establish paternity. However, a presumed father may bring an action to disestablish paternity only within a reasonable time after obtaining knowledge of relevant facts. The presumption of paternity may be rebutted only by clear, cogent, and convincing evidence. If it is in the best interests of the child not to disestablish paternity, a court may order that the presumed father remains the "legal father" for purposes of rights and obligations.

In any paternity action, the child must be made a party. If the child is a minor, the child must be represented by a guardian ad litem.

Blood or Genetic tests. The court may order the child, mother, or any alleged or presumed father to submit to blood or genetic tests. If a party requests additional blood or genetic tests, the party requesting must advance the full costs of the additional testing, unless the court finds the party is indigent and the initial lab recommends additional testing, or there is evidence that paternity is contrary to the initial test results.

Artificial Insemination. When a woman is artificially inseminated with semen donated by a man not her husband, the husband is treated in law as the natural father if he consented to the procedure. The donor is not considered the father unless there is a written agreement stating otherwise.

Adoption. Before an adoption of a minor child may occur, the parental rights of that child's biological parents must be severed, either through a voluntary relinquishment and consent to adoption, or a court order terminating parental rights. A parent who has not consented to an adoption, must be given notice of any hearing to terminate his or her parental rights. The father or alleged father's parental rights may be terminated if he fails to respond or appear at the hearing after being notified.

Summary of Bill: The UPA 1973 is repealed and replaced with UPA 2000 (UPA).

Establishing and Disestablishing Paternity. The presumption of paternity that is created when a man receives a child into his home and openly treats the child as his own is removed. The provision allowing a presumption of paternity to be rebutted only by clear and convincing evidence is also removed and procedures are created to rebut the presumption through genetic testing.

Generally, if there is a presumed father, a challenge to paternity must be commenced not later than two years after the child's birth. However, a proceeding may be maintained at any time when: (a) the presumed father and mother neither cohabitated nor engaged in sexual intercourse with each other during the probable time of conception; and (b) the presumed father never openly treated the child as his own.

A court may deny genetic testing of the presumed father if the court determines, among other things, that it would be inequitable to disestablish paternity. In determining whether to deny genetic testing, the court shall consider the best interest of the child and the following factors:

- The length of time between the proceeding to adjudicate parentage and the time that the presumed father received notice that he might not be the genetic father;
- the facts surrounding the presumed father's discovery of his possible nonpaternity;
- the nature of the father/child relationship;
- the age of the child;
- the harm to the child that may result if presumed paternity is successfully disproved;
- the relationship of the child to any alleged father;
- the extent to which the passage of time reduces the chances of establishing paternity of another man and a child support obligation for the child; and
- other factors that may affect the equities arising from the disruption of the father/child relationship or the chance of other harm to the child.

Acknowledged Father. An acknowledgment of paternity is a nonjudicial method of establishing paternity. An unrescinded, unchallenged acknowledgment is equivalent to an adjudication of paternity. A man can be the acknowledged father if he and the mother sign an acknowledgment that the child is a result of their sexual intercourse.

A person who signed an acknowledgment or denial of paternity may rescind it by commencing a court proceeding within a certain time. After that, the person may challenge the acknowledgment only on the basis of fraud, duress, or material mistake of fact and only within two years after the acknowledgment is filed with the state registrar. The party seeking to rescind has the burden of proof.

If a child has an acknowledged or adjudicated father, an individual, other than the child, who did not sign the acknowledgment or who was not a party to the adjudication, must commence an action to adjudicate paternity no later than two years after the effective date of the acknowledgment or adjudication.

If a child does not have a presumed, acknowledged, or adjudicated father, a proceeding to adjudicate parentage may be commenced at any time during the child's life and the child is not required to be made a party to the proceeding.

Genetic Testing. There is a legal presumption that a man is the genetic father if testing shows the man has at least a 99 percent probability of paternity and the ratio of likelihood of paternity is 100-to-1.

The paternity of a child who has a presumed, acknowledged, or adjudicated father may be disproved only by admissible results of genetic testing. If an individual whose paternity is being determined declines to submit to genetic testing as ordered by the court, the court may, on that basis, adjudicate that person as the parent.

The court or agency may not order in-utero testing of a child before birth. Testing must be the type reasonably relied upon by experts in the field and performed in an accredited testing laboratory. If a testing specimen of the alleged father is not available, the court for good cause and under just circumstances may order the man's relatives to submit specimens to be tested.

It is a gross misdemeanor if a person intentionally releases an identifiable specimen for any purpose other than that relevant to the paternity proceeding without a court order or the written permission of the person who furnished the specimen.

Child of Assisted Reproduction (AR). The new UPA is similar to the UPA 1973 regarding artificial insemination, but considers other forms of assisted reproduction as well. If a husband consents to AR by his wife, he is the father of the resulting child. If a marriage is dissolved before placement of eggs, sperm, or embryo, the former spouse is not the parent unless he consents in a record to be the parent if AR occurs after dissolution. The consent of the former spouse to AR may be revoked by that person in a record at any time before placement. Likewise, if a spouse dies before placement of eggs, sperm, or embryo, the deceased spouse is not a parent of the resulting child unless he consented in a record to be the parent if AR occurred after death.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect on July 1, 2002.

Testimony For: This bill helps to create uniformity between the states regarding determination of parentage. The bill does allow a father to obtain a parenting plan, and all the rights included in that, through an acknowledgment of paternity. Under current law, the father would just be on the hook for child support by an acknowledgment of paternity and would still have to go to court and initiate a paternity action in order to obtain a parenting plan.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: PRO: Representative Darneille, prime sponsor; Judge Marlin Appelwick, National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws; Rick Bartholomew, Washington State Bar Association, Family Law Section; Bill Harrington, American Fathers Alliance.