

DOMESTIC RELATIONS CODE (23 PA.C.S.) - PREVENTION OF ABDUCTION  
OF CHILDREN

Act of Jan. 22, 2014, P.L. 8, No. 5

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No. 2014-5

SB 689

AN ACT

Amending Title 23 (Domestic Relations) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, providing for prevention of abduction of children.

The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania hereby enacts as follows:

Section 1. Title 23 of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes is amended by adding a chapter to read:

CHAPTER 52  
UNIFORM CHILD ABDUCTION PREVENTION

Sec.

- 5201. Scope of chapter.
- 5202. Definitions.
- 5203. Cooperation and communication among courts.
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§ 5201. Scope of chapter.

This chapter relates to uniform child abduction prevention.

§ 5202. Definitions.

The following words and phrases when used in this chapter shall have the meanings given to them in this section unless the context clearly indicates otherwise:

" Abduction. " The wrongful removal or wrongful retention of a child.

" Child. " An unemancipated individual who is under 18 years of age.

" Child custody determination. " Any judgment, decree or other order of a court providing for the legal custody, physical custody or visitation with respect to a child. The term includes a permanent, temporary, initial and modification order.

" Child custody proceeding. " A proceeding in which legal custody, physical custody or visitation with respect to a child is at issue. The term includes a proceeding for divorce, dissolution of marriage, separation, neglect, abuse, dependency, guardianship, paternity, termination of parental rights or protection from domestic violence.

" Court. " An entity authorized under the law of a state to establish, enforce or modify a child custody determination.

" Petition. " A motion or its equivalent.

" Record. " Information that is inscribed on a tangible medium or that is stored in an electronic or other medium and is retrievable in perceivable form.

" State. " A state of the United States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands or any territory or insular possession subject to the jurisdiction of the United States. The term includes a federally recognized Indian tribe or nation.

" Travel document. " Records relating to a travel itinerary, including travel tickets, passes, reservations for transportation or accommodations. The term does not include a passport or visa.

" Wrongful removal. " The taking of a child that breaches rights of custody or visitation given or recognized under the laws of this Commonwealth.

" Wrongful retention. " The keeping or concealing of a child that breaches rights of custody or visitation given or recognized under the laws of this Commonwealth.

§ 5203. Cooperation and communication among courts.

Sections 5410 (relating to communication between courts), 5411 (relating to taking testimony in another state) and 5412 (relating to cooperation between courts; preservation of records) apply to cooperation and communication among courts in proceedings under this chapter.

§ 5204. Actions for abduction prevention measures.

(a) Court.--A court on its own motion may order abduction prevention measures in a child custody proceeding if the court finds that the evidence establishes a credible risk of abduction of the child.

(b) Party.--A party to a child custody determination or another individual or entity having a right under the laws of this Commonwealth or any other state to seek a child custody determination for the child may file a petition seeking abduction prevention measures to protect the child under this chapter.

(c) Prosecutors or public officials.--A prosecutor or public authority designated under section 5455 (relating to role of prosecutor or public official) may seek a warrant to take physical custody of a child under section 5209 (relating to warrant to take physical custody of child) or other appropriate prevention measures.

§ 5205. Jurisdiction.

(a) General rule.--A petition under this chapter may be filed only in a court that has jurisdiction to make a child custody determination with respect to the child at issue under Chapter 54 (relating to uniform child custody jurisdiction and enforcement).

(b) Emergency jurisdiction.--A court of this Commonwealth has temporary emergency jurisdiction under section 5424 (relating to temporary emergency jurisdiction) if the court finds a credible risk of abduction.

§ 5206. Contents of petition.

A petition under this chapter must be verified and include a copy of any existing child custody determination, if available. The petition must specify the risk factors for abduction, including the relevant factors described under section 5207 (relating to factors to determine risk of abduction). Subject to section 5429(e) (relating to information to be submitted to court), if reasonably ascertainable, the petition must contain:

(1) the name, date of birth and gender of the child;

(2) the customary address and current physical location of the child;

(3) the identity, customary address and current physical location of the respondent;

(4) a statement of whether a prior action to prevent abduction or domestic violence has been filed by a party or other individual or entity having custody of the child and the date, location and disposition of the action;

(5) a statement of whether a party to the proceeding has been arrested for a crime related to domestic violence, stalking or child abuse or neglect and the date, location and disposition of the case; and

(6) any other information required to be submitted to the court for a child custody determination under section 5429.

§ 5207. Factors to determine risk of abduction.

(a) Evidence supporting risk.--In determining whether there is a credible risk of abduction of a child, the court shall consider any evidence that the petitioner or respondent:

(1) has previously abducted or attempted to abduct the child;

(2) has threatened to abduct the child;

(3) has recently engaged in activities that may indicate a planned abduction, including:

(i) abandoning employment;

(ii) selling a primary residence;

(iii) terminating a lease;

(iv) closing bank or other financial management accounts, liquidating assets, hiding or destroying financial documents or conducting any unusual financial activities;

(v) applying for a passport or visa or obtaining travel documents for the respondent, a family member or the child; or

(vi) seeking to obtain the child's birth certificate or school or medical records;

(4) has engaged in domestic violence, stalking or child abuse or neglect;

(5) has refused to follow a child custody determination;

(6) lacks strong familial, financial, emotional or cultural ties to this Commonwealth or the United States;

(7) has strong familial, financial, emotional or cultural ties to another state or country;

(8) is likely to take the child to a country that:

(i) is not a party to the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction and does not provide for the extradition of an abducting parent or for the return of an abducted child;

(ii) is a party to the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction but:

(A) the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction is not in force between the United States and that country;

(B) according to the most recent compliance report issued by the United States Department of State, is noncompliant; or

(C) lacks legal mechanisms for immediately and effectively enforcing a return order under the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction;

(iii) poses a risk that the child's physical or emotional health or safety would be endangered in the

country because of specific circumstances relating to the child or because of human rights violations committed against children;

(iv) has laws or practices that would:

(A) enable the respondent, without due cause, to prevent the petitioner from contacting the child;

(B) restrict the petitioner from freely traveling to or exiting from the country because of the petitioner's gender, nationality, marital status or religion; or

(C) restrict the child's ability legally to leave the country after the child reaches the age of majority because of a child's gender, nationality or religion;

(v) is included by the United States Department of State on a current list of state sponsors of terrorism;

(vi) does not have an official United States diplomatic presence in the country; or

(vii) is engaged in active military action or war, including a civil war, to which the child may be exposed;

(9) is undergoing a change in immigration or citizenship status that would adversely affect the respondent's ability to remain in the United States legally;

(10) has had an application for United States citizenship denied;

(11) has forged or presented misleading or false evidence on government forms or supporting documents to obtain or attempt to obtain a passport, a visa, travel documents, a Social Security card, a driver's license or other government-issued identification card or has made a misrepresentation to the United States Government;

(12) has used multiple names to attempt to mislead or defraud; or

(13) has engaged in any other conduct the court considers relevant to the risk of abduction.

(b) Good faith.--In the hearing on a petition under this chapter, the court shall consider any evidence that the respondent believed in good faith that the respondent's conduct was necessary to avoid imminent harm to the child or respondent and any other evidence that may be relevant to whether the respondent may be permitted to remove or retain the child. § 5208. Provisions and measures to prevent abduction.

(a) Contents of discretionary orders.--If a petition is filed under this chapter, the court may enter an order that must include:

(1) the basis for the court's exercise of jurisdiction;

(2) the manner in which notice and opportunity to be heard were given to the persons entitled to notice of the proceeding;

(3) a detailed description of each party's custody and visitation rights and residential arrangements for the child;

(4) a provision stating that a violation of the order may subject the party in violation to civil and criminal penalties; and

(5) identification of the child's country of habitual residence at the time of the issuance of the order.

(b) Abduction prevention orders.--

(1) If, at a hearing on a petition under this chapter or on the court's own motion, the court after reviewing the evidence finds a credible risk of abduction of the child, the court shall enter an abduction prevention order.

(2) The order must include the provisions required by subsection (a) and measures and conditions, including those in subsections (c), (d) and (e), that are reasonably calculated to prevent abduction of the child, giving due consideration to the custody and visitation rights of the parties.

(3) The court shall consider:

- (i) the age of the child;
- (ii) the potential harm to the child from an abduction;
- (iii) the legal and practical difficulties of returning the child to the jurisdiction if abducted; and
- (iv) the reasons for the potential abduction, including evidence of domestic violence, stalking or child abuse or neglect.

(c) Restrictions.--An abduction prevention order may include one or more of the following:

(1) an imposition of travel restrictions that require that a party traveling with the child outside a designated geographical area provide the other party with the following:

- (i) the travel itinerary of the child;
- (ii) a list of physical addresses and telephone numbers at which the child can be reached at specified times; and
- (iii) copies of all travel documents;

(2) a prohibition of the respondent directly or indirectly:

- (i) removing the child from this Commonwealth, the United States or another geographic area without permission of the court or the petitioner's written consent;

- (ii) removing or retaining the child in violation of a child custody determination;

- (iii) removing the child from school or a child-care or similar facility; or

- (iv) approaching the child at any location other than a site designated for supervised visitation;

(3) a requirement that a party register the order in another state as a prerequisite to allowing the child to travel to that state;

(4) with regard to the child's passport:

- (i) a direction that the petitioner place the child's name in the United States Department of State's Child Passport Issuance Alert Program;

- (ii) a requirement that the respondent surrender to the court or the petitioner's attorney any United States or foreign passport issued in the child's name, including a passport issued in the name of both the parent and the child; and

- (iii) a prohibition upon the respondent from applying on behalf of the child for a new or replacement passport or visa;

(5) as a prerequisite to exercising custody or visitation, a requirement that the respondent provide:

- (i) to the United States Department of State Office of Children's Issues and the relevant foreign consulate or embassy, an authenticated copy of the order detailing passport and travel restrictions for the child;
- (ii) to the court:

- (A) proof that the respondent has provided the information in subparagraph (i); and

(B) an acknowledgment in a record from the relevant foreign consulate or embassy that no passport application has been made or passport issued on behalf of the child;

(iii) to the petitioner, proof of registration with the United States Embassy or other United States diplomatic presence in the destination country and with the Central Authority for the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction, if that convention is in effect between the United States and the destination country, unless one of the parties objects; and

(iv) a written waiver under 5 U.S.C. § 552 a (relating to records maintained on individuals), with respect to any document, application or other information pertaining to the child authorizing its disclosure to the court and the petitioner; and

(6) upon the petitioner's request, a requirement that the respondent obtain an order from the relevant foreign country containing terms identical to the child custody determination issued in the United States.

(d) Conditions on custody and visitation.--In an abduction prevention order, the court may impose conditions on the exercise of custody or visitation that:

(1) limit visitation or require that visitation with the child by the respondent be supervised until the court finds that supervision is no longer necessary and order the respondent to pay the costs of supervision;

(2) require the respondent to post a bond or provide other security in an amount sufficient to serve as a financial deterrent to abduction, the proceeds of which may be used to pay for the reasonable expenses of recovery of the child, including reasonable attorney fees and costs if there is an abduction; and

(3) require the respondent to obtain education on the potentially harmful effects to the child from abduction.

(e) Prevention of imminent abduction.--To prevent imminent abduction of a child, a court may:

(1) issue a warrant to take physical custody of the child under section 5209 (relating to warrant to take physical custody of child) or the laws of this Commonwealth other than this chapter;

(2) direct the use of law enforcement to take any action reasonably necessary to locate the child, obtain return of the child or enforce a custody determination under this chapter or the laws of this Commonwealth other than this chapter; or

(3) grant any other relief allowed under the laws of this Commonwealth other than this chapter.

(f) Cumulative remedies.--The remedies provided in this chapter are cumulative and do not affect the availability of other remedies to prevent abduction.

§ 5209. Warrant to take physical custody of child.

(a) Ex parte.--If a petition under this chapter contains allegations and the court finds that there is a credible risk that the child is imminently likely to be wrongfully removed, the court may issue an ex parte warrant to take physical custody of the child.

(b) Hearing.--The respondent on a petition under subsection (a) must be afforded an opportunity to be heard at the earliest possible time after the ex parte warrant is executed, but not later than the next judicial day unless a hearing on that date

is impossible. In that event, the court shall hold the hearing on the first judicial day possible.

(c) Requirements.--An ex parte warrant under subsection (a) to take physical custody of a child must:

(1) Recite the facts upon which a determination of a credible risk of imminent wrongful removal of the child is based.

(2) Direct law enforcement officers to take physical custody of the child immediately.

(3) State the date and time for the hearing on the petition.

(4) Provide for the safe interim placement of the child pending further order of the court.

(d) Search of databases.--If feasible, before issuing a warrant and before determining the placement of the child after the warrant is executed, the court may order a search of the relevant databases of the National Crime Information Center system and similar state databases to determine if either the petitioner or respondent has a history of domestic violence, stalking or child abuse or neglect.

(e) Service.--The petition and warrant must be served on the respondent when or immediately after the child is taken into physical custody.

(f) Enforcement.--

(1) A warrant to take physical custody of a child, issued by this Commonwealth or another state, is enforceable throughout this Commonwealth.

(2) If the court finds that a less intrusive remedy will not be effective, it may authorize law enforcement officers to enter private property to take physical custody of the child. If required by exigent circumstances, the court may authorize law enforcement officers to make a forcible entry at any hour.

(g) Fees and costs.--If the court finds, after a hearing, that a petitioner sought an ex parte warrant under subsection (a) for the purpose of harassment or in bad faith, the court may award the respondent reasonable attorney fees, costs and expenses.

(h) Other relief.--This chapter does not affect the availability of relief allowed under the laws of this Commonwealth other than this chapter.

§ 5210. Duration of abduction prevention order.

An abduction prevention order remains in effect until the earliest of:

(1) the time stated in the order;

(2) the emancipation of the child;

(3) the child's attaining 18 years of age; or

(4) the time the order is modified, revoked, vacated or superseded by a court with jurisdiction under sections 5421 (relating to initial child custody jurisdiction), 5422 (relating to exclusive, continuing jurisdiction) and 5423 (relating to jurisdiction to modify determination) and applicable laws of this Commonwealth.

§ 5211. Uniformity of application and construction.

In applying and construing this chapter, consideration must be given to the need to promote uniformity of the law with respect to its subject matter among states that enact it.

§ 5212. Relation to Electronic Signatures in Global and National Commerce Act.

To the extent permitted by section 102 of the Electronic Signatures in Global and National Commerce Act (Public Law

**106-229, 15 U.S.C. § 7002 ), this chapter may supersede provisions of that act.**

Section 2. This act shall take effect in 90 days.

APPROVED--The 22nd day of January, A.D. 2014.

TOM CORBETT