



PA 12-90—sHB 5395

*Select Committee on Veterans' Affairs
Judiciary Committee*

AN ACT CONCERNING CUSTODY ORDERS FOR DEPLOYED MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES AND CONFIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS MADE TO MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES WHO ARE VICTIM ADVOCATES OR SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION COORDINATORS

SUMMARY: This act establishes requirements and timeframes for (1) modifying court orders in child custody cases involving a parent who is in the military and deployed or mobilized for active duty, (2) hearing motions for permanent modifications of final custody orders after a deploying parent returns, and (3) establishing temporary parental rights when existing orders are pending or not in place.

It prohibits a court from entering a final order modifying a final custody or visitation order until 90 days after a deploying parent's deployment or mobilization ends, unless he or she agrees to a modification, but specifies that it does not stop the court from hearing a motion, at least 90 days after a deploying parent returns, for permanent modification of final orders of custody and visitation. It also sets the requirements for temporary modification of orders because of a deployment or mobilization.

The act adds armed forces members who have been trained and certified as victim advocates or sexual assault prevention coordinators under the military's sexual assault prevention and response program to the definition of "sexual assault counselor" for purposes of laws requiring:

1. communications between victim and counselor to generally be considered confidential and
2. mandated reporting for individuals who, in the ordinary course of their employment or profession, have reasonable cause to suspect or believe that any child under age 18 or person with an intellectual disability has been abused or neglected (CGS §§ 17a-101 and 46a-11b).

In expanding the definition, it also allows such trained armed forces members to act as professional counselors without a license (CGS § 20-195bb).

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2012, except for the provision expanding the definition of sexual assault counselor, which is effective upon passage.

PROHIBITION ON FINAL ORDER MODIFICATION

When a deploying parent must be separated from his or her child during a deployment or mobilization, the act prohibits a court from entering a final order of custody or visitation modifying a final order of custody or visitation until 90 days

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after the deployment or mobilization ends, unless the deploying parent agrees to the modification. It applies to final orders of custody or visitation related to custody, joint custody, or orders when parents live separately.

The act defines a “deploying parent” as an armed forces member notified by military leadership that he or she will deploy or mobilize with the armed forces. “Nondeploying parent” means a parent who has not been so notified.

The act defines:

1. “deploy” as military service in compliance with military orders that an armed forces member receives to report for combat, contingency, or peacekeeping operations; a remote tour of duty; or other active duty service, including a period during which the member remains subject to deployment orders and deployed on account of sickness, wounds, or other lawful cause;
2. “mobilize” as the call-up of National Guard or Reserve service members to extended active duty, but not National Guard or Reserve annual training, inactive duty days, drill weekends, temporary duty or state active duty; and
3. “armed forces” as the U.S. Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, Air Force, their reserve components, and the state’s National Guard under federal service.

Post-Deployment or -Mobilization

The act specifies that it does not stop the court from hearing a motion for permanent modification of final orders of custody and visitation at least 90 days after a deploying parent returns. The nondeploying parent bears the burden of showing that reentry of a final order of custody or visitation that was in effect before the deployment is no longer in the child’s best interest. The act further specifies that absence due to deployment or mobilization cannot be the sole basis for modifying orders.

TEMPORARY MODIFICATION ORDERS

Modification Request

Under the act, when an armed forces member receives notice of deployment or mobilization requiring separation from his or her child for whom he or she has sole or joint custody or court-ordered visitation, parental access, or parenting time, either the deploying or nondeploying parent may ask the court to modify any existing custody or visitation order. And the court may enter a temporary order of custody or visitation modifying final orders for the period of deployment or mobilization when certain conditions are met.

First, the court must find that the deployment or mobilization would have a material effect upon the deploying parent’s ability to exercise parental rights, responsibilities, or parent-child contact as set in the existing final orders of custody or visitation. Second, it must find modification is in the child’s best interests.

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The act (1) specifies that when issuing temporary modification orders in this situation, existing custody and visitation law must guide the court and (2) requires the court to hear motions for temporary modification of such final orders due to deployment as quickly as possible and give them priority.

Modification Requirements

A temporary court order modifying final orders of custody or visitation must specify that deployment or mobilization is the basis for the order, and the court must enter it as a temporary order. The order must also require the nondeploying parent to provide the court and the deploying parent with 30 days advance written notice of any change of address and telephone number, unless a court has ordered that the deploying parent is not entitled to this information.

Under the act, temporary modification orders issued under the act must designate the parent's (1) parental rights; (2) responsibilities; and (3) parent-child contact during a period of leave granted to the deploying parent, in the best interests of the child.

The act specifies that changes in actual leave dates cannot be used by the nondeploying parent to limit parent-child contact.

A temporary court order modifying final orders of custody or visitation issued under the act must require that the:

1. nondeploying parent make the child available to the deploying parent, to the extent he or she requests it, when the deploying parent has military leave (i.e., scheduled time off during deployment), provided (a) the request for visitation is not inconsistent with the final orders of custody or visitation being modified by the temporary court order and (b) the child not be absent from school unless the court orders it and both parents agree in writing;
2. nondeploying parent facilitate opportunities for telephone, electronic mail, and other contact between the deploying parent and the child during deployment or mobilization; and
3. deploying parent provide timely information about his or her leave schedule to the nondeploying parent.

PENDING AND NONEXISTENT ORDERS

If *pendente lite* orders of custody or visitation are in place (i.e., orders while litigation is pending) or if there are no existing orders of custody or visitation establishing the terms of parental rights and responsibilities or parent-child contact and it appears that deployment or mobilization is imminent, then on either parent's motion, the court must expedite a hearing to establish temporary parental rights and responsibilities and parent-child contact. This is to (1) ensure the deploying parent has access to the child, provided it is in the child's best interest; (2) ensure disclosure of information; (3) grant other rights and duties; and (4) provide other appropriate relief.

Any initial pleading filed to establish parental rights and responsibilities or parent-child contact with a child of a deploying parent must be identified at the

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time of filing by stating in the text of the pleading the specific facts related to deployment.

OLR Tracking: JRH:MJ:JSL:DY/ts