

**CHILD CUSTODY PROCEEDINGS AMENDMENTS**

2013 GENERAL SESSION

STATE OF UTAH

**Chief Sponsor: Luz Robles**

House Sponsor: LaVar Christensen

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**LONG TITLE**

**General Description:**

This bill reduces the age from 16 to 14 for children to express their opinion in custody cases.

**Highlighted Provisions:**

This bill:

- ▶ reduces the age from 16 to 14 for children who wish to express their opinion during child custody proceedings which parent they would prefer to reside with.

**Money Appropriated in this Bill:**

None

**Other Special Clauses:**

None

**Utah Code Sections Affected:**

AMENDS:

**30-3-10**, as last amended by Laws of Utah 2012, Chapters 269 and 271

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*Be it enacted by the Legislature of the state of Utah:*

Section 1. Section **30-3-10** is amended to read:

**30-3-10. Custody of children in case of separation or divorce -- Custody consideration.**

(1) If a husband and wife having minor children are separated, or their marriage is declared void or dissolved, the court shall make an order for the future care and custody of the minor children as it considers appropriate.

30 (a) In determining any form of custody, including a change in custody, the court shall  
31 consider the best interests of the child without preference for either the mother or father solely  
32 because of the biological sex of the parent and, among other factors the court finds relevant, the  
33 following:

- 34 (i) the past conduct and demonstrated moral standards of each of the parties;
- 35 (ii) which parent is most likely to act in the best interest of the child, including  
36 allowing the child frequent and continuing contact with the noncustodial parent;
- 37 (iii) the extent of bonding between the parent and child, meaning the depth, quality,  
38 and nature of the relationship between a parent and child; and
- 39 (iv) those factors outlined in Section 30-3-10.2.

40 (b) There shall be a rebuttable presumption that joint legal custody, as defined in  
41 Section 30-3-10.1, is in the best interest of the child, except in cases where there is:

- 42 (i) domestic violence in the home or in the presence of the child;
- 43 (ii) special physical or mental needs of a parent or child, making joint legal custody  
44 unreasonable;
- 45 (iii) physical distance between the residences of the parents, making joint decision  
46 making impractical in certain circumstances; or
- 47 (iv) any other factor the court considers relevant including those listed in this section  
48 and Section 30-3-10.2.

49 (c) The person who desires joint legal custody shall file a proposed parenting plan in  
50 accordance with Sections 30-3-10.8 and 30-3-10.9. A presumption for joint legal custody may  
51 be rebutted by a showing by a preponderance of the evidence that it is not in the best interest of  
52 the child.

53 (d) The children may not be required by either party to testify unless the trier of fact  
54 determines that extenuating circumstances exist that would necessitate the testimony of the  
55 children be heard and there is no other reasonable method to present their testimony.

56 (e) The court may inquire of the children and take into consideration the children's  
57 desires regarding future custody or parent-time schedules, but the expressed desires are not

58 controlling and the court may determine the children's custody or parent-time otherwise. The  
59 desires of a child [~~16~~ 14] years of age or older shall be given added weight, but is not the single  
60 controlling factor.

61 (f) If interviews with the children are conducted by the court pursuant to Subsection  
62 (1)(e), they shall be conducted by the judge in camera. The prior consent of the parties may be  
63 obtained but is not necessary if the court finds that an interview with the children is the only  
64 method to ascertain the child's desires regarding custody.

65 (2) In awarding custody, the court shall consider, among other factors the court finds  
66 relevant, which parent is most likely to act in the best interests of the child, including allowing  
67 the child frequent and continuing contact with the noncustodial parent as the court finds  
68 appropriate.

69 (3) If the court finds that one parent does not desire custody of the child, the court shall  
70 take that evidence into consideration in determining whether to award custody to the other  
71 parent.

72 (4) (a) Except as provided in Subsection (4)(b), a court may not discriminate against a  
73 parent due to a disability, as defined in Section 57-21-2, in awarding custody or determining  
74 whether a substantial change has occurred for the purpose of modifying an award of custody.

75 (b) If a court takes a parent's disability into account in awarding custody or determining  
76 whether a substantial change has occurred for the purpose of modifying an award of custody,  
77 the parent with a disability may rebut any evidence, presumption, or inference arising from the  
78 disability by showing that:

79 (i) the disability does not significantly or substantially inhibit the parent's ability to  
80 provide for the physical and emotional needs of the child at issue; or

81 (ii) the parent with a disability has sufficient human, monetary, or other resources  
82 available to supplement the parent's ability to provide for the physical and emotional needs of  
83 the child at issue.

84 (c) Nothing in this section may be construed to apply to adoption proceedings under  
85 Title 78B, Chapter 6, Part 1, Utah Adoption Act.

86           (5) This section establishes neither a preference nor a presumption for or against joint  
87 physical custody or sole physical custody, but allows the court and the family the widest  
88 discretion to choose a parenting plan that is in the best interest of the child.