

**Paul A. Cutler** proposes the following substitute bill:

**Family Court Amendments**

2026 GENERAL SESSION

STATE OF UTAH

**Chief Sponsor: Paul A. Cutler**

Senate Sponsor: Michael K. McKell

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**LONG TITLE**

**General Description:**

This bill addresses family law proceedings.

**Highlighted Provisions:**

This bill:

- defines terms;
- addresses factors for a court to consider when deciding whether to award costs, attorney fees, and witness fees in a family law proceeding;
- provides a process for ordering mental health treatment in a child custody proceeding;
- provides that a court may consider evidence of coercive control when making a child custody or parent-time decision;
- creates a new part addressing a child custody evaluation; and
- makes technical and conforming changes.

**Money Appropriated in this Bill:**

None

**Other Special Clauses:**

None

**Utah Code Sections Affected:**

AMENDS:

**81-1-203**, as renumbered and amended by Laws of Utah 2024, Chapter 366

**81-9-101**, as last amended by Laws of Utah 2025, Chapter 48

**81-9-104**, as enacted by Laws of Utah 2024, Chapter 453

**81-9-204**, as last amended by Laws of Utah 2025, Chapter 426

**81-9-206**, as renumbered and amended by Laws of Utah 2024, Chapter 366

ENACTS:

**81-9-501**, Utah Code Annotated 1953

29 **81-9-502**, Utah Code Annotated 1953

30 **81-9-503**, Utah Code Annotated 1953

31 **81-9-504**, Utah Code Annotated 1953

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

34 Section 1. Section **81-1-203** is amended to read:

35 **81-1-203 . Award of costs and attorney and witness fees -- Temporary support**  
 36 **and maintenance.**

37 (1)(a) In an action filed under Chapter 4, Dissolution of Marriage, Title 78B, Chapter 7,  
 38 Part 6, Cohabitant Abuse Protective Orders, or in an action to establish an order of  
 39 custody, parent-time, child support, alimony, or the division of property in a domestic  
 40 case, the court may order a party to pay the costs, attorney fees, and witness fees,  
 41 including expert witness fees, of the other party to enable the other party to prosecute  
 42 or defend the action.

43 (b) The order under Subsection (1)(a) may include a provision for costs of the action.

44 (c) A court may grant an order under Subsection (1)(a) if the court finds that:

45 (i) the party requesting the costs and fees lacks the financial resources to pay the  
 46 costs and fees;

47 (ii) the nonrequesting party has the financial resources to pay the costs and fees;

48 (iii) the costs and fees are necessary for prosecuting or defending the action; and

49 (iv) the amount of the costs and fees are reasonable.

50 (d)(i) A court may not find that a party lacks the financial resources to pay the costs  
 51 and fees under Subsection (1)(c)(i) if the party chooses:

52 (A) not to earn an income despite being able and available to earn an income; or

53 (B) to earn significantly less income than the individual is able to earn considering  
 54 the individual's physical capabilities, education, training, and experience.

55 (ii) Subsection (1)(d)(i) does not apply if an individual:

56 (A) is actively seeking a source of income consistent with the individual's physical  
 57 capabilities, education, training, and experience;

58 (B) does not earn an income or earns significantly less income than the individual  
 59 is capable of earning to care for a child or vulnerable adult, as that term is  
 60 defined in Section 76-5-111; or

61 (C) is between income-earning periods in seasonal or project-based employment  
 62 that is consistent with the individual's physical capabilities, education, training,

63 and experience.

- 64 (2) In an action to enforce an order of custody, parent-time, child support, alimony, or  
 65 division of property in a domestic case, the court may award costs and attorney fees  
 66 upon determining that the party substantially prevailed upon the claim or defense.
- 67 (3) The court, in the court's discretion, may award no fees or limited fees against a party if  
 68 the court finds the party is indigent or enters in the record the reason for not awarding  
 69 fees.
- 70 (4) In an action described in Subsection (1), the court may order a party to provide money,  
 71 during the pendency of the action, for the separate support and maintenance of the other  
 72 party and of a minor child in the custody of the other party.
- 73 (5) The court may amend an order entered in accordance with this section before the entry  
 74 of the final order or judgment or in the final order or judgment.

75 Section 2. Section **81-9-101** is amended to read:

76 **81-9-101 . Definitions for chapter.**

77 As used in this chapter:

- 78 (1) "Abuse" means the same as that term is defined in Section 80-1-102.
- 79 (2)(a) "Coercive control" means an individual's pattern of behavior that, intentionally or  
 80 in effect, unreasonably interferes with another individual's ability to make or act on  
 81 independent decisions.
- 82 (b) "Coercive control" includes a pattern of:
- 83 (i) isolating another individual from friends, relatives, or sources of support;  
 84 (ii) depriving another individual of basic necessities;  
 85 (iii) controlling, regulating, or excessively monitoring another individual's  
 86 movements, communications, daily behavior, finances, economic resources, or  
 87 access to services;  
 88 (iv) threatening to harm or kill another individual, a relative of the individual, or a  
 89 household animal that is owned or kept by the individual;  
 90 (v) threatening self-harm;  
 91 (vi) threatening to publish information with the intent to harass or intimidate another  
 92 individual;  
 93 (vii) damaging property or household goods; or  
 94 (viii) compelling another individual by force, threat of force, or intimidation to:  
 95 (A) engage in conduct from which the other individual has a right to abstain; or  
 96 (B) abstain from conduct in which the other individual has a right to engage.

- 97     ~~[(2)]~~ (3)(a) "Custodial responsibility" means all powers and duties relating to caretaking  
98         authority and decision-making authority for a minor child.
- 99         (b) "Custodial responsibility" includes physical custody, legal custody, parenting time,  
100         right to access, parent-time, and authority to grant limited contact with a minor child.
- 101     ~~[(3)]~~ (4) "Domestic violence" means the same as that term is defined in Section 77-36-1.
- 102     ~~[(4)]~~ (5) "Gender identity" means the same as that term is defined in Section 34A-5-102.
- 103     (6) "Household animal" means the same as that term is defined in Section 78B-7-102.
- 104     ~~[(5)]~~ (7) "Joint legal custody" means the sharing of the rights, privileges, duties, and powers  
105         of a parent by both parents, where specified.
- 106     ~~[(6)]~~ (8) "Joint physical custody" means the minor child stays with each parent overnight for  
107         more than 30% of the year and both parents contribute to the expenses of the minor child  
108         in addition to paying child support.
- 109     ~~[(7)]~~ (9)(a) "Parenting functions" means those aspects of the parent-child relationship in  
110         which the parent makes decisions and performs functions necessary for the care and  
111         growth of the minor child.
- 112         (b) "Parenting functions" include:
- 113             (i) maintaining a loving, stable, consistent, and nurturing relationship with the minor  
114             child;
- 115             (ii) attending to the daily needs of the minor child, such as feeding, clothing, physical  
116             care, grooming, supervision, health care, day care, and engaging in other activities  
117             which are appropriate to the developmental level of the minor child and that are  
118             within the social and economic circumstances of the particular family;
- 119             (iii) attending to adequate education for the minor child, including remedial or other  
120             education essential to the best interest of the minor child;
- 121             (iv) assisting the minor child in developing and maintaining appropriate interpersonal  
122             relationships;
- 123             (v) exercising appropriate judgment regarding the minor child's welfare, consistent  
124             with the minor child's developmental level and family social and economic  
125             circumstances; and
- 126             (vi) providing for the financial support of the minor child.
- 127     ~~[(8)]~~ (10)(a) "Parenting plan" means a plan for parenting a minor child.
- 128         (b) "Parenting plan" includes the allocation of parenting functions that are incorporated  
129         in any final decree or decree of modification including an action for dissolution of  
130         marriage, annulment, legal separation, or paternity.

131 [~~(9)~~] (11) "Protective order" means:

- 132 (a) a civil protective order, as that term is defined in Section 78B-7-102;  
 133 (b) an ex parte civil protective order, as that term is defined in Section 78B-7-102; or  
 134 (c) a foreign protection order, as that term is defined in Section 78B-7-302.

135 [~~(10)~~] (12) "Psychological maltreatment" means a repeated pattern or extreme incident of  
 136 caretaker behavior that:

- 137 (a) intentionally thwarts a minor child's basic psychological needs, including physical  
 138 and psychological safety, cognitive stimulation, and respect;  
 139 (b) conveys that a minor child is worthless, defective, or expendable; and  
 140 (c) may terrorize a minor child.

141 [~~(11)~~] (13) "[~~-~~]Service member" means a member of a uniformed service.

142 [~~(12)~~] (14) "Sexual abuse" means the same as that term is defined in Section 80-1-102.

143 [~~(13)~~] (15) "Supervised parent-time" means parent-time that requires the noncustodial parent  
 144 to be accompanied during parent-time by an individual approved by the court.

145 [~~(14)~~] (16) "Surrogate care" means care by any individual other than the parent of the minor  
 146 child.

147 [~~(15)~~] (17) "Uniformed service" means:

- 148 (a) active and reserve components of the United States Armed Forces;  
 149 (b) the United States Merchant Marine;  
 150 (c) the commissioned corps of the United States Public Health Service;  
 151 (d) the commissioned corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration of  
 152 the United States; or  
 153 (e) the National Guard of a state.

154 [~~(16)~~] (18) "Uninterrupted time" means parent-time exercised by one parent without  
 155 interruption at any time by the presence of the other parent.

156 [~~(17)~~] (19) "Virtual parent-time" means parent-time facilitated by tools such as telephone,  
 157 email, instant messaging, video conferencing, and other wired or wireless technologies  
 158 over the [~~Internet~~] internet or other communication media, to supplement in-person visits  
 159 between a noncustodial parent and a minor child or between a minor child and the  
 160 custodial parent when the minor child is staying with the noncustodial parent.

161 Section 3. Section **81-9-104** is amended to read:

162 **81-9-104 . Expert evidence -- Violence or abuse findings -- Child relationship and**  
 163 **reunification.**

164 (1) As used in this section:

- 165 (a)(i) "Child custody proceeding" means a civil proceeding between the parents of a  
166 minor child that involves the care or custody of the minor child, including  
167 proceedings involving:
- 168 (A) divorce;
  - 169 (B) separation;
  - 170 (C) parent-time;
  - 171 (D) paternity;
  - 172 (E) child support; or
  - 173 (F) legal or physical custody of the minor child.
- 174 (ii) "Child custody proceeding" does not include:
- 175 (A) a child protective, abuse, or neglect proceeding;
  - 176 (B) a juvenile justice proceeding; or
  - 177 (C) a child placement proceeding in which a state, local, or tribal government, a  
178 designee of such a government, or any contracted child welfare agency or child  
179 protective services agency of such a government is a party to the proceeding.
- 180 (b) "Forensic" means professional activities undertaken pursuant to a court order or for  
181 use in litigation, including the evaluation or treatment of a parent, minor child, or  
182 other individual who is involved in a child custody proceeding.
- 183 (c) "Reunification treatment" means a treatment or therapy aimed at reuniting or  
184 reestablishing a relationship between a minor child and an estranged or rejected  
185 parent or other family member of the minor child.
- 186 (2) In a child custody proceeding, if a parent is alleged to have committed domestic  
187 violence or abuse, including sexual abuse:
- 188 (a) the court may admit expert evidence from a court-appointed or outside professional  
189 relating to alleged domestic violence or abuse only if the professional possesses  
190 demonstrated expertise and adequate experience in working with victims of domestic  
191 violence or abuse, including sexual abuse, that is not solely of a forensic nature; and
  - 192 (b) in making a finding regarding an allegation of domestic violence or abuse, including  
193 sexual abuse, the court shall consider evidence of past domestic violence, sexual  
194 violence, or abuse committed by the accused parent, including:
    - 195 (i) any past or current protective order against the accused parent; or
    - 196 (ii) any charge, arrest, or conviction of the accused parent for domestic violence,  
197 sexual violence, or abuse.
- 198 (3) Subsection (2) does not preclude the court from:

- 199 (a) admitting expert evidence, subject to rules of evidence, from a court-appointed or  
200 outside professional relating to issues other than alleged domestic violence or abuse;  
201 or
- 202 (b) admitting evidence, subject to rules of evidence, that is discovered or otherwise  
203 becomes available through treatment or therapy after the court enters an order of  
204 custody or parent-time.
- 205 (4) As part of a child custody proceeding, a court may not, solely [~~in order~~]to improve a  
206 deficient relationship between a parent and a minor child, including in the context of  
207 reunification treatment:
- 208 (a) remove the minor child from a parent or litigating party:
- 209 (i) who is competent and not physically or sexually abusive; and  
210 (ii) with whom the minor child is bonded; or
- 211 (b) restrict reasonable contact between the minor child and a parent or litigating party:
- 212 (i) who is competent and not physically or sexually abusive; and  
213 (ii) with whom the minor child is bonded.
- 214 (5) As part of a child custody proceeding where the court has reasonable cause to believe  
215 that there is domestic violence, child abuse, or an ongoing risk to the child:
- 216 (a) a court may not order a reunification treatment or program unless there is generally  
217 accepted proof:
- 218 (i) of the physical and psychological safety, effectiveness, and therapeutic value of  
219 the reunification treatment; and  
220 (ii) that the reunification treatment is not associated with causing harm to a child;
- 221 (b) a court may not order a reunification treatment that is predicated on cutting off a  
222 minor child from a parent:
- 223 (i) who is competent and not physically or sexually abusive; and  
224 (ii) with whom the minor child is bonded;
- 225 (c) any order to remediate the resistance of a minor child to have contact with a violent  
226 or abusive parent shall primarily address the behavior of that parent or the  
227 contributions of that parent to the resistance of the minor child; and
- 228 (d) any order to a parent who meets the criteria in Subsections (5)(b)(i) and (ii), and that  
229 requires the parent to take steps to potentially improve the minor child's relationship  
230 with a violent or abusive parent, shall:
- 231 (i) prioritize the minor child's physical and psychological safety and needs; and  
232 (ii) be narrowly tailored to address specific behavior.

- 233 (6) Subject to Subsection (4), Subsection (5) does not preclude the court from ordering  
234 mental health treatment by a licensed mental health professional that is generally  
235 accepted by and meets the standards of practice for mental health professions if:
- 236 (a) the court does not have reasonable cause to believe that there is domestic violence,  
237 child abuse, or an ongoing risk to the child; and
- 238 (b) the treatment does not pose a risk to the child or parent.
- 239 (7)(a) Except as provided in Subsection (7)(b), the parents shall, by mutual agreement,  
240 select a licensed mental health professional to provide mental health treatment if the  
241 court orders mental health treatment that includes treatment of a minor child.
- 242 (b) If the parents cannot agree on a licensed mental health professional to provide mental  
243 health treatment ordered by the court:
- 244 (i) each parent shall submit to the court:
- 245 (A) a list of three licensed mental health professionals the parent recommends to  
246 provide the mental health treatment;
- 247 (B) a brief statement explaining each mental health professional's qualifications to  
248 provide the mental health treatment; and
- 249 (C) a brief statement verifying that, to the best of the parent's knowledge, the  
250 mental health professional does not have a conflict of interest with either  
251 parent or counsel for either parent; and
- 252 (ii) the court shall select a licensed mental health professional from the lists to  
253 provide the mental health treatment.
- 254 (c) If a court is required to select a licensed mental health professional as described in  
255 Subsection (7)(b), the court shall:
- 256 (i) consider the financial ability of each parent required to participate in or pay for the  
257 mental health treatment;
- 258 (ii) order mental health treatment with an in-network provider if coverage is available  
259 through an in-network provider under a health insurance plan of the minor child  
260 required to participate in mental health treatment; and
- 261 (iii) to the extent practicable, select a provider located near the minor child ordered to  
262 participate in mental health treatment, or near the parent primarily responsible for  
263 transporting the minor child to mental health treatment.
- 264 (8)(a) When ordering mental health treatment that includes treatment of a minor child:
- 265 (i) the court may not require:
- 266 (A) the mental health professional ordered to provide the mental health treatment

- 267 to be affiliated with a specific professional organization; or  
 268 (B) a minor child to miss school during regular school hours to attend mental  
 269 health treatment, unless the court determines no reasonable alternative exists;  
 270 and  
 271 (ii) the court may require the mental health professional to have the training  
 272 necessary to maintain the state licensure required to provide the mental health  
 273 treatment.
- 274 (9)(a) A mental health professional who provides mental health treatment to a minor  
 275 child involved in a child custody proceeding may not serve in any other professional  
 276 capacity in the child custody proceeding if doing so creates, or appears to create, a  
 277 conflict of interest.
- 278 (b) Subsection (9)(a) applies regardless of whether the mental health treatment was  
 279 ordered by the court or obtained without a court order.

280 Section 4. Section **81-9-204** is amended to read:

281 **81-9-204 . Custody and parent-time of a minor child -- Custody factors --**

282 **Preferences.**

- 283 (1) In a proceeding between parents in which the custody and parent-time of a minor child  
 284 is at issue, the court shall consider the best interests of the minor child in determining  
 285 any form of custody and parent-time.
- 286 (2) The court shall determine whether an order for custody or parent-time is in the best  
 287 interests of the minor child by a preponderance of the evidence.
- 288 (3) In determining any form of custody and parent-time under Subsection (1), the court  
 289 shall consider:
- 290 (a) for each parent, and in accordance with Section 81-9-104, evidence of domestic  
 291 violence, physical abuse, or sexual abuse involving the minor child, the parent, or a  
 292 household member of the parent;
- 293 (b) whether the parent has intentionally exposed the minor child to:
- 294 (i) pornography; or  
 295 (ii) material harmful to minors, as "material" and "harmful to minors" are defined in  
 296 Section 76-5c-101; and
- 297 (c) whether custody and parent-time would endanger the minor child's health or physical  
 298 or psychological safety.
- 299 (4) In determining the form of custody and parent-time that is in the best interests of the  
 300 minor child, the court may consider, among other factors the court finds relevant, the

- 301 following for each parent:
- 302 ~~(a)~~ (a) evidence of coercive control;
- 303 ~~(b)~~ (b) evidence of psychological maltreatment;
- 304 ~~(c)~~ (c) the parent's demonstrated understanding of, responsiveness to, and ability to
- 305 meet the developmental needs of the minor child, including the minor child's:
- 306 (i) physical needs;
- 307 (ii) emotional needs;
- 308 (iii) educational needs;
- 309 (iv) medical needs; and
- 310 (v) any special needs;
- 311 ~~(d)~~ (d) the parent's capacity and willingness to function as a parent, including:
- 312 (i) parenting skills;
- 313 (ii) co-parenting skills, including:
- 314 (A) ability to appropriately communicate with the other parent;
- 315 (B) ability to encourage the sharing of love and affection; and
- 316 (C) willingness to allow frequent and continuous contact between the minor child
- 317 and the other parent, except that, if the court determines that the parent is
- 318 acting to protect the minor child from domestic violence, neglect, or abuse, the
- 319 parent's protective actions may be taken into consideration; and
- 320 (iii) ability to provide personal care rather than surrogate care;
- 321 ~~(e)~~ (e) the past conduct and demonstrated moral character of the parent as described in
- 322 Subsection (9);
- 323 ~~(f)~~ (f) the emotional stability of the parent;
- 324 ~~(g)~~ (g) the parent's inability to function as a parent because of drug abuse, excessive
- 325 drinking, or other causes;
- 326 ~~(h)~~ (h) the parent's reason for having relinquished custody or parent-time in the past;
- 327 ~~(i)~~ (i) duration and depth of desire for custody or parent-time;
- 328 ~~(j)~~ (j) the parent's religious compatibility with the minor child;
- 329 ~~(k)~~ (k) the parent's financial responsibility;
- 330 ~~(l)~~ (l) the child's interaction and relationship with step-parents, extended family
- 331 members~~[-of]~~ , or other individuals who may significantly affect the minor child's best
- 332 interests;
- 333 ~~(m)~~ (m) who has been the primary caretaker of the minor child;
- 334 ~~(n)~~ (n) previous parenting arrangements in which the minor child has been happy and

335 well-adjusted in the home, school, and community;  
336 ~~[(n)]~~ (o) the relative benefit of keeping siblings together;  
337 ~~[(o)]~~ (p) the stated wishes and concerns of the minor child, taking into consideration the  
338 minor child's cognitive ability and emotional maturity;  
339 ~~[(p)]~~ (q) the relative strength of the minor child's bond with the parent, meaning the  
340 depth, quality, and nature of the relationship between the parent and the minor child;  
341 and  
342 ~~[(q)]~~ (r) any other factor the court finds relevant.

343 (5)(a) A minor child may not be required by either party to testify unless the trier of fact  
344 determines that extenuating circumstances exist that would necessitate the testimony  
345 of the minor child be heard and there is no other reasonable method to present the  
346 minor child's testimony.

347 (b)(i) The court may inquire and take into consideration the minor child's desires  
348 regarding future custody or parent-time schedules, but the expressed desires are  
349 not controlling and the court may determine the minor child's custody or  
350 parent-time otherwise.

351 (ii) The desires of a minor child who is 14 years old or older shall be given added  
352 weight, but is not the single controlling factor.

353 (c)(i) If an interview with a minor child is conducted by the court in accordance with  
354 Subsection (5)(b), the interview shall be conducted by the court in camera.

355 (ii) The prior consent of the parties may be obtained but is not necessary if the court  
356 finds that an interview with a minor child is the only method to ascertain the  
357 minor child's desires regarding custody.

358 (6)(a) Except as provided in Subsection (6)(b), a court may not discriminate against a  
359 parent due to a disability, as defined in Section 57-21-2, in awarding custody or  
360 determining whether a substantial change has occurred for the purpose of modifying  
361 an award of custody.

362 (b) The court may not consider the disability of a parent as a factor in awarding custody  
363 or modifying an award of custody based on a determination of a substantial change in  
364 circumstances, unless the court makes specific findings that:

365 (i) the disability significantly or substantially inhibits the parent's ability to provide  
366 for the physical and emotional needs of the minor child at issue; and

367 (ii) the parent with a disability lacks sufficient human, monetary, or other resources  
368 available to supplement the parent's ability to provide for the physical and

- 369 emotional needs of the minor child at issue.
- 370 (c) Nothing in this section may be construed to apply to adoption proceedings under  
371 Chapter 13, Adoption.
- 372 (7) This section does not establish:
- 373 (a) a preference for either parent solely because of the gender of the parent; or  
374 (b) a preference for or against joint physical custody or sole physical custody, but allows  
375 the court and the family the widest discretion to choose a parenting plan that is in the  
376 best interest of the minor child.
- 377 (8) When an issue before the court involves custodial responsibility in the event of a  
378 deployment of a parent who is a service member and the service member has not yet  
379 been notified of deployment, the court shall resolve the issue based on the standards in  
380 Sections 81-10-306 through 81-10-309.
- 381 (9) In considering the past conduct and demonstrated moral standards of each party under  
382 Subsection [~~(4)(d)~~] (4)(e) or any other factor a court finds relevant, the court may not:
- 383 (a)(i) consider or treat a parent's lawful possession or use of cannabis in a medicinal  
384 dosage form, a cannabis product in a medicinal dosage form, or a medical  
385 cannabis device, in accordance with Title 4, Chapter 41a, Cannabis Production  
386 Establishments and Pharmacies, Title 26B, Chapter 4, Part 2, Cannabinoid  
387 Research and Medical Cannabis, or Subsection 58-37-3.7(2) or (3) any differently  
388 than the court would consider or treat the lawful possession or use of any  
389 prescribed controlled substance; or  
390 (ii) discriminate against a parent because of the parent's status as a:
- 391 (A) cannabis production establishment agent, as that term is defined in Section  
392 4-41a-102;
- 393 (B) medical cannabis pharmacy agent, as that term is defined in Section 26B-4-201;
- 394 (C) medical cannabis courier agent, as that term is defined in Section [~~26B-4-201~~]  
395 4-41a-102; or  
396 (D) medical cannabis cardholder in accordance with Title 26B, Chapter 4, Part 2,  
397 Cannabinoid Research and Medical Cannabis; or
- 398 (b) discriminate against a parent based upon the parent's agreement or disagreement with  
399 a minor child of the couple's:
- 400 (i) assertion that the minor child's gender identity is different from the minor child's  
401 biological sex;
- 402 (ii) practice of having or expressing a different gender identity than the minor child's

- 403 biological sex; or  
404 (iii) sexual orientation.
- 405 (10)(a) The court shall consider evidence of domestic violence if evidence of domestic  
406 violence is presented.
- 407 (b) The court shall consider as primary, the safety and well-being of the minor child and  
408 the parent who experiences domestic violence.
- 409 (c) A court shall consider an order issued by a court in accordance with Title 78B,  
410 Chapter 7, Part 6, Cohabitant Abuse Protective Orders, as evidence of real harm or  
411 substantiated potential harm to the minor child.
- 412 (d) If a parent relocates because of an act of domestic violence or family violence by the  
413 other parent, the court shall make specific findings and orders with regards to the  
414 application of Section 81-9-209.
- 415 (11) Absent a showing by a preponderance of evidence of real harm or substantiated  
416 potential harm to the minor child:
- 417 (a) it is in the best interest of the minor child to have frequent, meaningful, and  
418 continuing access to each parent following separation or divorce;
- 419 (b) each parent is entitled to and responsible for frequent, meaningful, and continuing  
420 access with the parent's minor child consistent with the minor child's best interests;  
421 and
- 422 (c) it is in the best interest of the minor child to have both parents actively involved in  
423 parenting the minor child.
- 424 (12) Notwithstanding any other provision of this chapter, the court may not grant custody or  
425 parent-time of a minor child to a parent convicted of a sexual offense, as defined in  
426 Section 77-37-2, that resulted in the conception of the minor child unless:
- 427 (a) the nonconvicted biological parent, or the legal guardian of the minor child, consents  
428 to custody or parent-time and the court determines it is in the best interest of the  
429 minor child to award custody or parent-time to the convicted parent; or
- 430 (b) after the date of the conviction, the convicted parent and the nonconvicted parent  
431 cohabit and establish a mutual custodial environment for the minor child.
- 432 (13) A denial of custody or parent-time under Subsection (12) does not:
- 433 (a) terminate the parental rights of the parent denied parent-time or custody; or  
434 (b) affect the obligation of the convicted parent to financially support the minor child.
- 435 Section 5. Section **81-9-206** is amended to read:  
436 **81-9-206 . Determination of parent-time schedule -- Parent-time factors.**

- 437 (1) If the parties are unable to agree on a parent-time schedule, the court may:
- 438 (a) establish a parent-time schedule; or
- 439 (b) order a parent-time schedule described in Part 3, Parent-time Schedules.
- 440 (2) There is a presumption that the advisory guidelines described in Section 81-9-202 and
- 441 the parent-time schedules described in Part 3, Parent-time Schedules, are the minimum
- 442 parent-time to which the noncustodial parent and the minor child are entitled.
- 443 (3) In accordance with Section 81-9-104, when ordering a parent-time schedule a court
- 444 shall consider:
- 445 (a) evidence of domestic violence, physical abuse, or sexual abuse involving the minor
- 446 child, a parent, or a household member of the parent; and
- 447 (b) whether parent-time would endanger the minor child's health or physical or
- 448 psychological safety.
- 449 (4) A court may consider the following when ordering a parent-time schedule:
- 450 (a) evidence of coercive control;
- 451 [~~(a)~~] (b) evidence of psychological maltreatment;
- 452 [~~(b)~~] (c) the distance between the residency of the minor child and the noncustodial
- 453 parent;
- 454 [~~(c)~~] (d) the lack of demonstrated parenting skills without safeguards to ensure the minor
- 455 child's well-being during parent-time;
- 456 [~~(d)~~] (e) the financial inability of the noncustodial parent to provide adequate food and
- 457 shelter for the minor child during periods of parent-time;
- 458 [~~(e)~~] (f) the preference of the minor child if the court determines the minor child is of
- 459 sufficient maturity;
- 460 [~~(f)~~] (g) the incarceration of the noncustodial parent in a county jail, secure youth
- 461 corrections facility, or an adult corrections facility;
- 462 [~~(g)~~] (h) shared interests between the minor child and the noncustodial parent;
- 463 [~~(h)~~] (i) the involvement or lack of involvement of the noncustodial parent in the school,
- 464 community, religious, or other related activities of the minor child;
- 465 [~~(i)~~] (j) the availability of the noncustodial parent to care for the minor child when the
- 466 custodial parent is unavailable to do so because of work or other circumstances;
- 467 [~~(j)~~] (k) a substantial and chronic pattern of missing, canceling, or denying regularly
- 468 scheduled parent-time;
- 469 [~~(k)~~] (l) the minimal duration of and lack of significant bonding in the parents'
- 470 relationship before the conception of the minor child;

471           ~~[(t)]~~ (m) the parent-time schedule of siblings;  
472           ~~[(m)]~~ (n) the lack of reasonable alternatives to the needs of a nursing minor child; and  
473           ~~[(m)]~~ (o) any other criteria the court determines relevant to the best interests of the minor  
474           child.

- 475       (5) The court shall enter the reasons underlying the court's order for parent-time that:  
476           (a) incorporates a parent-time schedule described in Section 81-9-302 or 81-9-304; or  
477           (b) provides more or less parent-time than a parent-time schedule described in Section  
478           81-9-302 or 81-9-304.
- 479       (6) A court may not order a parent-time schedule unless the court determines by a  
480           preponderance of the evidence that the parent-time schedule is in the best interest of the  
481           minor child.
- 482       (7) Once the parent-time schedule has been established, the parties may not alter the  
483           parent-time schedule except by mutual consent of the parties or a court order.
- 484       (8)(a) If the court orders parent-time and a protective order or stalking injunction is still  
485           in place, the court shall consider whether to order the parents to conduct parent-time  
486           pick-up and transfer through a third party.
- 487           (b) The parent who is the stated victim in the protective order or stalking injunction may  
488           submit to the court, and the court shall consider, the name of a person considered  
489           suitable to act as the third party.
- 490           (c) If the court orders the parents to conduct parent-time through a third party, the  
491           parenting plan shall specify the time, day, place, manner, and the third party to be  
492           used to implement the exchange.
- 493       (9) If there is a protective order, stalking injunction, or the court finds that a parent has  
494           committed domestic violence, the court shall:  
495           (a) consider the impact of domestic violence in awarding parent-time; and  
496           (b) make specific findings regarding the award of parent-time.
- 497       (10) Upon a specific finding by the court of the need for peace officer enforcement, the  
498           court may include a provision in an order for parent-time that authorizes a peace officer  
499           to enforce the order for parent-time.
- 500       (11) When parent-time has not taken place for an extended period of time and the minor  
501           child lacks an appropriate bond with the noncustodial parent, both parents shall consider  
502           the possible adverse effects upon the minor child and gradually reintroduce an  
503           appropriate parent-time plan for the noncustodial parent.

504           Section 6. Section **81-9-501** is enacted to read:

**Part 5. Custody Evaluation**

**81-9-501 . Definitions for part.**

As used in this part:

- (1) "Custody evaluation" means a process in which a custody evaluator gathers and reports to a court information that a court would find relevant in making a decision regarding custody or parent-time that is in a minor child's best interest.
- (2) "Custody evaluator" means an individual who meets the qualifications described in Subsection 81-9-502(1).
- (3) "Party" means the petitioner or respondent, or a petitioner or respondent's attorney, in an action for separation, divorce, or custody of a minor child.

Section 7. Section **81-9-502** is enacted to read:

**81-9-502 . Custody evaluator qualifications -- Roster of custody evaluators.**

(1)(a) To be a custody evaluator, an individual shall:

(i) be licensed by the Division of Professional Licensing as a:

(A) clinical social worker under Title 58, Chapter 60, Part 2, Social Worker

Licensing Act;

(B) psychologist under Title 58, Chapter 61, Psychologist Licensing Act;

(C) physician under Title 58, Chapter 67, Part 3, Licensing, and is board trained in psychiatry;

(D) marriage and family therapist under Title 58, Chapter 60, Part 3, Marriage and Family Therapist Licensing Act; or

(E) clinical mental health counselor under Title 58, Chapter 60, Part 4, Clinical Mental Health Counselor Licensing Act; and

(ii) subject to Subsection (1)(b), have completed at least 18 hours of education or training on:

(A) the psychological and developmental needs of children, including needs related to decisions about child custody and parent-time;

(B) family dynamics, including parent-child relationships, blended families, and extended family relationships; and

(C) the effects of separation, divorce, domestic violence, child sexual or physical abuse, emotional abuse or neglect, substance abuse, and interparental conflict on the psychological and developmental needs of children and adults.

(b) An individual shall complete the 18 hours of education or training described in Subsection (1)(a)(ii) within two years before the later of:

- 539           (i) the day on which the individual received a license described in Subsection (1)(a)(i);  
 540           or  
 541           (ii) the day on which the individual renewed a license described in Subsection  
 542           (1)(a)(i).
- 543   (2)(a) The Administrative Office of the Courts shall maintain a roster of custody  
 544   evaluators.
- 545   (b) The roster of custody evaluators shall include the name, business address, telephone  
 546   number, email address, custody evaluation fees, and professional license expiration  
 547   date of each custody evaluator.
- 548   (c) To be included on the roster of custody evaluators, the Administrative Office of the  
 549   Courts may require a custody evaluator to submit documentation:  
 550    (i) proving the individual meets the qualifications described in Subsection (1); and  
 551    (ii) providing the information described in Subsection (2)(b).
- 552   (d) The Administrative Office of the Courts shall:  
 553    (i) make the roster of custody evaluators available to a court and parties for use in  
 554    selecting a custody evaluator; and  
 555    (ii) remove from the roster of custody evaluators any individual who fails to comply  
 556    with this section.

557   Section 8. Section **81-9-503** is enacted to read:

558    **81-9-503 . Custody evaluation order -- Appointment of custody evaluator --**

559    **Removal of a custody evaluator.**

- 560   (1) A court may order a custody evaluation during a divorce, separation, or custody  
 561   proceeding if:  
 562    (a)(i) a party requests a custody evaluation; or  
 563    (ii) the court makes specific findings that extraordinary circumstances exist that  
 564    warrant a custody evaluation; and  
 565    (b) the court finds that the parties have the ability to pay for the custody evaluation.
- 566   (2)(a) Except as provided in Subsection (2)(b) and subject to Subsection (3), a court  
 567   shall appoint a custody evaluator agreed upon by both parties to perform a custody  
 568   evaluation described in Subsection (1).
- 569   (b) If the parties cannot agree on a custody evaluator to perform a custody evaluation:  
 570    (i) each party shall exchange the names of three custody evaluators that the party  
 571    recommends to provide the custody evaluation;  
 572    (ii) the parties shall submit to the court a joint list of all proposed custody evaluators;

- 573                   and
- 574                   (iii) if a party objects to any of the custody evaluators on the list described in
- 575                   Subsection (2)(b)(ii), the party shall submit to the court a brief written statement
- 576                   explaining the reasons for the objection, including any potential conflicts of
- 577                   interest; and
- 578                   (iv) the court shall appoint a custody evaluator from the list described in Subsection
- 579                   (2)(b)(ii) after considering any statements described in Subsection (2)(b)(iii).
- 580                   (c) A party has the right to a reasonable opportunity to review a proposed custody
- 581                   evaluator before the court appoints the custody evaluator to perform a custody
- 582                   evaluation.
- 583                   (3) If, based on allegations of domestic violence or abuse, a court reasonably anticipates
- 584                   that a custody evaluator may be required to testify or offer an opinion regarding
- 585                   domestic violence or abuse, the court shall require that each custody evaluator agreed
- 586                   upon or proposed under Subsection (2) possess the demonstrated expertise and adequate
- 587                   experience described in Subsection 81-9-104(2)(a).
- 588                   (4) An order described in Subsection (1) shall:
- 589                   (a) identify the appointed custody evaluator;
- 590                   (b) identify specific custody factors described in Sections 81-9-204 and 81-9-205 to be
- 591                   addressed in the custody evaluation;
- 592                   (c) require the parties to comply with requests made by the custody evaluator;
- 593                   (d) restrict disclosure of the custody evaluator's findings, recommendations, and
- 594                   privileged information, except in the proceeding in which the custody evaluation is
- 595                   ordered or in other proceedings in which the court determines disclosure is necessary;
- 596                   (e) assign payment responsibility for the custody evaluation; and
- 597                   (f) specify the dates on which the custody evaluation will begin and end.
- 598                   (5) A party has the right to request the court to remove a custody evaluator for good cause,
- 599                   including:
- 600                   (a) bias, prejudice, or lack of impartiality toward a party;
- 601                   (b) a conflict of interest;
- 602                   (c) failure to comply with this part, rules of the court, or professional standards;
- 603                   (d) failure to complete the custody evaluation in a timely manner; or
- 604                   (e) professional misconduct or unethical behavior.
- 605                   (6)(a) A custody evaluator's findings in making a custody or parent-time decision are
- 606                   advisory only.

607 (b) There is no presumption in favor of the custody evaluator's findings.

608 Section 9. Section **81-9-504** is enacted to read:

609 **81-9-504 . Custody evaluator responsibilities -- Communication between a**  
610 **custody evaluator and parties.**

611 (1) A custody evaluator shall:

612 (a) remain impartial;

613 (b) disclose to the court and each party any conflicts of interest the custody evaluator has  
614 with either party; and

615 (c) immediately notify the Administrative Office of the Courts of any changes in  
616 licensure status.

617 (2) A custody evaluator may not act as an advocate for either party.

618 (3) If a custody evaluator is assigned to a proceeding involving domestic violence, sexual  
619 abuse, substance abuse, or mental illness, and the custody evaluator lacks specialized  
620 training on the issue, the custody evaluator shall:

621 (a) consult with an individual with specialized training on the issue;

622 (b) assess, in the custody evaluation, any potential danger to a party or minor child  
623 arising from the issue; and

624 (c) include, in the custody evaluation, the name of the individual with whom the custody  
625 evaluator consulted and the results of the consultation.

626 (4) If a custody evaluator assigned to a proceeding has conducted fewer than three custody  
627 evaluations, the custody evaluator shall consult with another custody evaluator who can  
628 review, instruct, and provide feedback during the custody evaluation process.

629 (5) When a court appoints a custody evaluator, a party and a custody evaluator may not  
630 communicate with each other without providing notice of the communication to the  
631 other party, except to the extent reasonably necessary to conduct the custody evaluation  
632 ordered by the court.

633 Section 10. **Effective Date.**

634 This bill takes effect on May 6, 2026.