

Karianne Lisonbee proposes the following substitute bill:

Child Welfare Changes

2026 GENERAL SESSION

STATE OF UTAH

Chief Sponsor: Karianne Lisonbee

Senate Sponsor:

LONG TITLE

General Description:

This bill addresses guardians ad litem and consideration of a minor's best interest.

Highlighted Provisions:

This bill:

- makes modifications to the Guardian ad Litem Oversight Committee;
- requires an attorney guardian ad litem and a private attorney guardian ad litem to communicate a minor's expressed interests to a court;
- modifies the responsibilities of the director of the Office of Guardian ad Litem;
- requires an attorney guardian ad litem and a private attorney guardian ad litem to represent the expressed interests of a minor that is at least 8 years old, rather than the minor's best interest;
- requires an attorney guardian ad litem and a private attorney guardian ad litem to inform the court at each hearing:
 - the minor's expressed wishes; and
 - the date of the guardian ad litem's last interaction with the minor;
- requires an attorney guardian ad litem and a private attorney guardian ad litem to video record all interactions with a minor that is less than 14 years old;
- addresses when a guardian ad litem is appointed;
- adjusts the responsibilities and obligations of a guardian ad litem;
- addresses records in child welfare cases; and
- directs a court to consider the best interest of a minor within the context of the principles and provisions in Section 80-4-104.

Money Appropriated in this Bill:

None

Other Special Clauses:

None

Utah Code Sections Affected:

AMENDS:

78A-2-104, as last amended by Laws of Utah 2023, Chapter 394

78A-2-702, as last amended by Laws of Utah 2021, Chapter 262

78A-2-703, as last amended by Laws of Utah 2019, Chapter 326

78A-2-704, as last amended by Laws of Utah 2022, Chapter 335

78A-2-705, as last amended by Laws of Utah 2022, Chapter 272

78A-2-801, as last amended by Laws of Utah 2022, Chapter 334

78A-2-802, as last amended by Laws of Utah 2023, Chapter 394

78A-2-803, as last amended by Laws of Utah 2023, Chapter 280

80-2-102, as last amended by Laws of Utah 2025, Chapter 48

80-2-301, as last amended by Laws of Utah 2025, Chapters 173, 174

80-2a-101, as last amended by Laws of Utah 2025, Chapter 426

80-3-102, as last amended by Laws of Utah 2025, Chapter 426

80-3-104, as last amended by Laws of Utah 2022, Chapter 334

80-4-102, as last amended by Laws of Utah 2022, Chapter 335

81-13-202, as renumbered and amended by Laws of Utah 2025, Chapter 426

ENACTS:

78A-2-104.5, Utah Code Annotated 1953

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

Section 1. Section **78A-2-104** is amended to read:

**78A-2-104 . Judicial Council -- Creation -- Members -- Terms and election --
Responsibilities -- Reports.**

(1) The Judicial Council is composed of:

- (a) the chief justice of the Supreme Court;
- (b) one member elected by the justices of the Supreme Court;
- (c) one member elected by the judges of the Court of Appeals;
- (d) one member elected by the judges of the Business and Chancery Court;
- (e) six members elected by the judges of the district courts;
- (f) three members elected by the judges of the juvenile courts;
- (g) three members elected by the justice court judges; and
- (h) a member or ex officio member of the Board of Commissioners of the Utah State Bar

who is an active member of the Utah State Bar in good standing at the time of election by the Board of Commissioners.

(2) The Judicial Council shall have a seal.

(3)(a) The chief justice of the Supreme Court shall act as presiding officer of the Judicial Council and chief administrative officer for the courts.

(b) The chief justice shall vote only in the case of a tie.

(4)(a) All members of the Judicial Council shall serve for three-year terms.

(b) If a Judicial Council member should die, resign, retire, or otherwise fail to complete a term of office, the appropriate constituent group shall elect a member to complete the term of office.

(c) In courts having more than one member, the members shall be elected to staggered terms.

(d) The individual elected by the Board of Commissioners under Subsection (1)(h) may complete a three-year term of office on the Judicial Council even though the individual ceases to be a member or ex officio member of the Board of Commissioners.

(e) The individual elected by the Board of Commissioners under Subsection (1)(h) shall be an active member of the Utah State Bar in good standing for the entire term of the Judicial Council.

(f) Elections are held under rules made by the Judicial Council.

(5)(a) The Judicial Council is responsible for the development of uniform administrative policy for the courts throughout the state.

(b) The presiding officer of the Judicial Council is responsible for the implementation of the policies developed by the Judicial Council and for the general management of the courts, with the aid of the state court administrator.

(c) The Judicial Council has authority and responsibility to:

(i) establish and assure compliance with policies for the operation of the courts, including uniform rules and forms; and

(ii) publish and submit to the governor, the chief justice of the Supreme Court, and the Legislature an annual report of the operations of the courts, which shall include financial and statistical data and may include suggestions and recommendations for legislation.

(6) The Judicial Council shall establish standards for the operation of the courts of the state, including facilities, court security, support services, and staff levels for judicial and

97 support personnel.

98 (7) The Judicial Council shall by rule:

99 (a) establish the time and manner for destroying court records, including computer
100 records; and

101 (b) establish retention periods for court records.

102 (8)(a) Consistent with the requirements of judicial office and security policies, the
103 Judicial Council shall establish procedures to govern the assignment of state vehicles
104 to public officers of the judicial branch.

105 (b) The vehicles shall be marked in a manner consistent with Section 41-1a-407 and may
106 be assigned for unlimited use, within the state only.

107 (9)(a) The Judicial Council shall:

108 (i) advise judicial officers and employees concerning ethical issues; and

109 (ii) establish procedures for issuing informal and formal advisory opinions on ethical
110 issues.

111 (b) Compliance with an informal opinion is evidence of good faith compliance with the
112 Code of Judicial Conduct.

113 (c) A formal opinion constitutes a binding interpretation of the Code of Judicial Conduct.

114 (10)(a) The Judicial Council shall establish written procedures authorizing the presiding
115 officer of the Judicial Council to appoint judges of courts of record by special or
116 general assignment to serve temporarily in another level of court in a specific court or
117 generally within that level.

118 (b) The appointment under Subsection (10)(a) shall be:

119 (i) for a specific period of time; and

120 (ii) reported to the Judicial Council.

121 (c) The Judicial Council shall develop the procedures described in this Subsection (10)
122 in accordance with Subsection 78A-2-107(2) regarding the temporary appointment of
123 judges.

124 (11)(a) The Judicial Council may by rule designate municipalities in addition to those
125 designated by statute as a location of a trial court of record.

126 (b) There shall be at least one court clerk's office open during regular court hours in each
127 county.

128 (c) Any trial court of record may hold court in any municipality designated as a location
129 of a court of record.

130 (12) The Judicial Council shall by rule determine whether the administration of a court is

the obligation of the Administrative Office of the Courts or whether the Administrative Office of the Courts should contract with local government for court support services.

(13) The Judicial Council may by rule direct that a district court location be administered from another court location within the county.

(14)[(a)] The Judicial Council shall:

[(i)] (a) establish the Office of Guardian [Ad] ad Litem in accordance with Title 78A, Chapter 2, Part 8, Guardian Ad Litem; and

[(ii)] (b) establish and supervise a Guardian [Ad] ad Litem Oversight Committee[-], in accordance with Section 78A-2-104.5.

~~[(b) The Guardian Ad Litem Oversight Committee described in Subsection (14)(a)(ii) shall oversee the Office of Guardian Ad Litem, established under Subsection (14)(a)(i), and assure that the Office of Guardian Ad Litem complies with state and federal law, regulation, policy, and court rules.]~~

(15) The Judicial Council shall establish and maintain, in cooperation with the Office of Recovery Services within the Department of Health and Human Services, the part of the state case registry that contains records of each support order established or modified in the state on or after October 1, 1998, as is necessary to comply with the Social Security Act, 42 U.S.C. Sec. 654a.

Section 2. Section **78A-2-104.5** is enacted to read:

78A-2-104.5 . Guardian ad Litem Oversight Committee.

(1) There is established the Guardian ad Litem Oversight Committee, supervised by the Judicial Council.

(2) The committee shall consist of:

(a) seven members appointed by the Judicial Council, including:

(i) a current or former juvenile court judge;

(ii) two attorneys with experience in child welfare cases, including at least one attorney with experience in representing parents;

(iii) a behavioral or mental health clinical provider with experience working with families involved in child welfare cases;

(iv) an individual with experience working with or advocating for youth in foster care;

(v) an individual with lived experience as a parent involved with the child welfare system; and

(vi) an individual with lived experience as a child or youth involved with the child welfare system;

- (b) two members appointed by the Administrative Office of the Courts, including:
(i) a current or former court administrator; and
(ii) a current internal court auditor;
(c) a member of the Senate, whom the president of the Senate appoints;
(d) a member of the House of Representatives, whom the speaker of the House of
Representatives appoints; and
(e) the guardian ad litem director, described in Section 78A-2-802, or the director's
designee.

(3) The committee shall:

- (a) oversee the statewide guardian ad litem program;
(b) evaluate the Office of Guardian ad Litem's compliance with the statutory obligations
described in Section 78A-2-802;
(c) assess the effectiveness of the statewide guardian ad litem program, including in:
(i) cases in which the minor is the subject of an abuse, neglect, or dependency
petition as described in Section 78A-2-803;
(ii) cases in which an attorney guardian ad litem is appointed by the district court as
described in Section 78A-2-703;
(iii) cases in which a private guardian ad litem is appointed, as described in Section
78A-2-705; and
(iv) any other cases in which a guardian ad litem represents a minor, including as
described in Section 78B-7-202, 80-4-106, 80-7-104, or 81-13-203;
(d) annually review a randomly selected sample of the statewide guardian ad litem
program cases, including attorney guardian ad litem and private guardian ad litem
cases;
(e) review the reports described in Sections 78A-2-802 and 80-2-1104; and
(f) make recommendations regarding the statewide guardian ad litem program.

(4) In reviewing cases as described in Subsection (3)(d), the committee shall assess:

- (a) whether the office is adequately representing the minor's interests;
(b) compliance with the requirement to conduct an independent investigation, meet with
the minor, and keep the minor informed regarding the case; and
(c) the outcomes of cases for children and families.

(5) The committee may:

- (a) replace the guardian ad litem director in accordance with Section 78A-2-802;
(b) establish policies, requirements, or guidelines for guardians ad litem; and

(c) subject to Subsection (6), review and discuss individual cases assigned to the Office of Guardian ad Litem.

(6)(a) If the committee discusses an individual case, the committee shall close the committee's meeting in accordance with Title 52, Chapter 4, Open and Public Meetings Act.

(b) A record of the committee regarding an individual case:

(i) is classified as private under Section 63G-2-302; and

(ii) may be disclosed only in accordance with federal law and Title 63G, Chapter 2, Government Records Access and Management Act.

(c) The committee shall have access to all of the Office of Guardian ad Litem's records, including records regarding individual cases.

(d) Except as provided in Subsection (6)(c), and notwithstanding Title 63G, Chapter 2, Government Records Access and Management Act, all records of an attorney guardian ad litem are confidential and may not be released or made public upon subpoena, search warrant, discovery proceedings, or otherwise.

(e) In accordance with Title 63G, Chapter 2, Government Records Access and Management Act, all documents and information received by the committee from the Office of Guardian ad Litem shall maintain the same classification under Title 63G, Chapter 2, Government Records Access and Management Act, that was designated by the Office of Guardian ad Litem.

(f) Subsection (6)(c) is an exception to Rules of Professional Conduct, Rule 1.6, as provided by Rule 1.6(b)(4), because of:

(i) the unique role of an attorney guardian ad litem; and

(ii) the state's role and responsibility to provide a guardian ad litem program, and as parens patriae, to protect minors.

(7) The committee shall meet at least quarterly.

(8) A member may not receive compensation or benefits for the member's service, but may receive per diem and travel expenses in accordance with:

(a) Section 63A-3-106;

(b) Section 63A-3-107; and

(c) rules made by the Division of Finance in accordance with Sections 63A-3-106 and 63A-3-107.

(9) On or before November 1, the committee shall provide an annual report to the Judicial Council and the Child Welfare Legislative Oversight Panel regarding the committee's

activities, findings, and recommendations.

Section 3. Section **78A-2-702** is amended to read:

78A-2-702 . Definitions.

(1) As used in this part:

~~[(1)]~~ (a) "Attorney guardian ad litem" means an attorney employed by the office.

~~[(2)]~~ (b) "Director" means the director of the office.

~~[(3)]~~ (c) "Guardian ad litem" means an attorney guardian ad litem or a private attorney guardian ad litem.

~~[(4)]~~ (d) "Office" means the Office of Guardian ad Litem, created in Section 78A-2-802.

~~[(5)]~~ (e) "Private attorney guardian ad litem" means an attorney designated by the office in accordance with Section 78A-2-705 who is not an employee of the office.

(2) A determination of a minor's best interest under this part shall be made in accordance with Sections 80-2a-201, 80-4-104, and any other section of this title consistent with those sections.

Section 4. Section **78A-2-703** is amended to read:

78A-2-703 . Appointment of attorney guardian ad litem in district court matters.

(1)~~(a)~~ A district court may appoint an attorney guardian ad litem to represent ~~[the best interests of]~~ a minor in the following district court matters:

~~[(a)]~~ (i) protective order proceedings; and

~~[(b)]~~ (ii) district court actions when:

~~[(i)]~~ (A) child abuse, child sexual abuse, or neglect is alleged in a formal complaint, petition, or counterclaim;

~~[(ii)]~~ (B) the child abuse, child sexual abuse, or neglect described in Subsection ~~[(1)(b)(i)]~~ (1)(a)(ii)(A) has been reported to Child Protective Services;

~~[(iii)]~~ (C) the court makes a finding that the adult parties to the case are indigent individuals, as defined in Section 78B-22-102; and

~~[(iv)]~~ (D) the district court determines that there are no private attorney guardians ad litem who are reasonably available to be appointed in the district court action.

(b) An attorney guardian ad litem that is appointed in accordance with Subsection (1)(a) shall:

(i) represent the child's best interest for a minor that is less than 8 years old; or

(ii) represent the child's expressed interest for a minor that is 8 years old or older.

(2)(a) A court may not appoint an attorney guardian ad litem in a criminal case.

(b) Subsection (2)(a) does not prohibit the appointment of an attorney guardian ad litem in a case where a court is determining whether to adjudicate a minor for committing an act that would be a crime if committed by an adult.

(c) Subsection (2)(a) does not prohibit an attorney guardian ad litem from entering an appearance, filing motions, or taking other action in a criminal case on behalf of a minor, if:

(i) the attorney guardian ad litem is appointed to represent the minor in a case that is not a criminal case; and

(ii) the interests of the minor may be impacted by:

(A) an order that has been, or may be, issued in the criminal case; or

(B) other proceedings that have occurred, or may occur, in the criminal case.

(3) If a court appoints an attorney guardian ad litem in a divorce or child custody case, the court shall:

(a) specify in the order appointing the attorney guardian ad litem the specific issues in the proceeding that the attorney guardian ad litem is required to be involved in resolving, which may include issues relating to the custody of children and parent-time schedules;

(b) to the extent possible, bifurcate the issues specified in the order described in Subsection (3)(a) from the other issues in the case, in order to minimize the time constraints placed upon the attorney guardian ad litem in the case; and

(c) except as provided in Subsection (5), within one year after the day on which the attorney guardian ad litem is appointed in the case, issue a final order:

(i) resolving the issues in the order described in Subsection (3)(a); and

(ii) terminating the appointment of the attorney guardian ad litem in the case.

(4) A court shall issue an order terminating the appointment of an attorney guardian ad litem made under this section, if:

(a) the court determines that the allegations of abuse or neglect are unfounded;

(b) after receiving input from the attorney guardian ad litem, the court determines that the children are no longer at risk of abuse or neglect; or

(c) there has been no activity in the case for which the attorney guardian ad litem is appointed for a period of six consecutive months.

(5) A court may issue a written order extending the one-year period described in Subsection (3)(c) for a time certain, if the court makes a written finding that there is a compelling reason that the court cannot comply with the requirements described in Subsection (3)(c)

within the one-year period.

- (6) When appointing an attorney guardian ad litem for a minor under this section, a court may appoint the same attorney guardian ad litem who represents the minor in another proceeding, or who has represented the minor in a previous proceeding, if that attorney guardian ad litem is available.
- (7) The court is responsible for all costs resulting from the appointment of an attorney guardian ad litem and shall use funds appropriated by the Legislature for the guardian ad litem program to cover those costs.
- (8) An attorney guardian ad litem appointed in accordance with the requirements of this section and Chapter 2, Part 8, Guardian Ad Litem, is, when serving in the scope of duties of an attorney guardian ad litem, considered an employee of this state for purposes of indemnification under the Governmental Immunity Act.

Section 5. Section **78A-2-704** is amended to read:

78A-2-704 . Public policy regarding attorney guardian ad litem -- Training.

- (1) An attorney guardian ad litem may not presume that a child and the child's parent are adversaries.
- (2) An attorney guardian ad litem shall be trained on and implement into practice:
- (a) the parental rights and child and family protection principles provided in Section 80-2a-201;
 - (b) the fundamental liberties of parents and the public policy of the state to support family unification to the fullest extent possible;
 - (c) the constitutionally protected rights of parents, in cases where the state is a party;
 - (d) the use of a least restrictive means analysis regarding state claims of a compelling child welfare interest;
 - (e) the priority of maintaining a child safely in the child's home, whenever possible;
 - (f) the importance of:
 - (i) kinship placement, ~~[in the event]~~ if the child is removed from the home;~~[-and]~~
 - (ii) keeping sibling groups together, whenever practicable and in the best interests of the children; and
 - (iii) understanding and communicating the minor's expressed interests to the court;
 - (g) the preference for kinship adoption over nonkinship adoption, if the parent-child relationship is legally terminated;
 - (h) the potential for a guardianship placement if the parent-child relationship is legally terminated and no appropriate adoption placement is available; and

(i) the use of an individualized permanency plan, only as a last resort.

(3) The office shall implement policies and practice guidelines that reflect the priorities described in Subsections (2)(e) through (i) for the placement of children.

Section 6. Section **78A-2-705** is amended to read:

78A-2-705 . Private attorney guardian ad litem -- Appointment -- Costs and fees -- Duties -- Conflicts of interest -- Pro bono obligation -- Indemnification -- Minimum qualifications.

(1)(a) The court may appoint an attorney as a private attorney guardian ad litem to represent ~~[the best interests of the]~~ a minor in any district court action when:

~~[(a)]~~ (i) child abuse, child sexual abuse, or neglect is alleged in any proceeding, and the court has made a finding that an adult party is not indigent as determined under Section 78B-22-202; or

~~[(b)]~~ (ii) the custody of, or parent-time with, a child is at issue.

(b) A private guardian ad litem that is appointed in accordance with Subsection (1)(a) shall:

(i) represent the minor's best interest for a minor that is less than 8 years old; or

(ii) represent the minor's expressed interest for a minor that is 8 years old or older.

(2)(a) The court shall consider the limited number of eligible private attorneys guardian ad litem, as well as the limited time and resources available to a private attorney guardian ad litem, when making an appointment under Subsection (1) and prioritize case assignments accordingly.

(b) The court shall make findings regarding the need and basis for the appointment of a private attorney guardian ad litem.

(c) A court may not appoint a private attorney guardian ad litem in a criminal case.

(3)(a) If the parties stipulate to a private attorney guardian ad litem, the office shall assign the stipulated private attorney guardian ad litem to the case in accordance with this section.

(b) If, under Subsection (3)(a), the parties have not stipulated to a private attorney guardian ad litem, or if the stipulated private attorney guardian ad litem is unable to take the case, the court shall appoint a private attorney guardian ad litem in accordance with Subsection (3)(c).

(c) The court shall state in an order that the court is appointing a private attorney guardian ad litem, to be assigned by the office, to represent the best interests or expressed interests of the child in the matter.

(d) The court shall send the order described in Subsection (3)(c) to the office, in care of the Private Attorney Guardian ad Litem program.

(4) The court shall:

(a) specify in the order appointing a private attorney guardian ad litem the specific issues in the proceeding that the private attorney guardian ad litem shall be involved in resolving, which may include issues relating to the custody of the child and a parent-time schedule;

(b) to the extent possible, bifurcate the issues described in Subsection (4)(a) from the other issues in the case in order to minimize the time constraints placed upon the private attorney guardian ad litem; and

(c) except as provided in Subsection (6), issue a final order within one year after the day on which the private attorney guardian ad litem is appointed in the case:

(i) resolving the issues described in Subsection (4)(a); and

(ii) terminating the private attorney guardian ad litem from the appointment to the case.

(5) The court shall issue an order terminating the appointment of a private attorney guardian ad litem made under this section if:

(a) after receiving input from the private attorney guardian ad litem, the court determines that the minor no longer requires the services of the private attorney guardian ad litem; or

(b) there has been no activity in the case for a period of six consecutive months.

(6) A court may issue an order extending the one-year period described in Subsection (4)(c) for a specified amount of time if the court makes a written finding that there is a compelling reason that the court cannot comply with the requirements described in Subsection (4)(c) within the one-year period.

(7) When appointing a private attorney guardian ad litem under this section, a court may appoint the same private attorney guardian ad litem who represents the minor in another proceeding, or who has represented the minor in a previous proceeding, if that private attorney guardian ad litem is available.

(8)(a) Upon receipt of the court's order, described in Subsections (3)(c) and (d), the office shall assign the case to a private attorney guardian ad litem, if available, in accordance with this section.

(b)(i) If, after the initial assignment of a private attorney guardian ad litem, either party objects to the assigned private attorney guardian ad litem, that party may file

an objection with the court within seven days after the day on which the party received notice of the assigned private attorney guardian ad litem.

(ii) If, after the initial assignment of a private attorney guardian ad litem, either attorney for a party discovers that the private attorney guardian ad litem represents an adverse party in a separate matter, that attorney may file an objection with the court within seven days after the day on which the attorney received notice of the private attorney guardian ad litem's representation of an adverse party in a separate matter.

(iii) Upon receipt of an objection, the court shall determine whether grounds exist for the objection, and if grounds exist, the court shall order, without a hearing, the office to assign a new private attorney guardian ad litem, in consultation with the parties and in accordance with this section.

(iv) If no alternative private attorney guardian ad litem is available, the office shall notify the court.

(9)(a) When appointing a private attorney guardian ad litem, the court shall:

(i) assess all or part of the private attorney guardian ad litem fees, court costs, and paralegal, staff, and volunteer expenses against the parties in a proportion the court determines to be just; and

(ii) designate in the order whether the private attorney guardian ad litem shall, as established by rule under Subsection (17):

(A) be paid a set fee and initial retainer;

(B) not be paid and serve pro bono; or

(C) be paid at a rate less than the set fee established by court rule.

(b) If a party claims to be indigent, the court shall follow the procedure and make a determination, as described in Section 78A-2-302, to set the amount that the party is required to pay, if any, toward the private attorney guardian ad litem's fees and expenses.

(c) The private attorney guardian ad litem may adjust the court-ordered fees or retainer to an amount less than what was ordered by the court at any time before being released from representation by the court.

(10) Upon accepting the court's appointment, the assigned private attorney guardian ad litem shall:

(a) file a notice of appearance with the court within five business days of the day on which the attorney was assigned; and

(b) represent ~~[the best interests of]~~the minor as described in Subsection (1)(b) until released by the court.

(11) The private attorney guardian ad litem:

(a) shall be certified by the director of the office as meeting the minimum qualifications for appointment; and

(b) may not be employed by, or under contract with, the office unless under contract as a conflict private attorney guardian ad litem in an unrelated case.

(12) The private attorney guardian ad litem appointed under the provisions of this section shall:

(a) represent the ~~[best interests of the]~~minor as described in Subsection (1)(b) from the date of the appointment until released by the court;

(b) conduct or supervise an ongoing, independent investigation in order to obtain, first-hand, a clear understanding of the situation and needs of the minor;

(c) interview witnesses and review relevant records pertaining to the minor and the minor's family, including medical, psychological, and school records;

(d)(i) personally meet with the minor, unless:

(A) the minor is outside of the state; or

(B) meeting with the minor would be detrimental to the minor;

(ii) personally interview the minor, unless:

(A) the minor is not old enough to communicate;

(B) the minor lacks the capacity to participate in a meaningful interview; or

(C) the interview would be detrimental to the minor;

(iii) to the extent possible, determine the minor's goals and concerns regarding custody or visitation; and

(iv) to the extent possible, and unless it would be detrimental to the minor, keep the minor advised of:

(A) the status of the minor's case;

(B) all court and administrative proceedings;

(C) discussions with, and proposals made by, other parties;

(D) court action; and

(E) the psychiatric, medical, or other treatment or diagnostic services that are to be provided to the minor;

(e) unless excused by the court, prepare for and attend all mediation hearings and all court conferences and hearings, and present witnesses and exhibits as necessary to

protect the [best] interests of the minor;

(f) identify community resources to protect the [best] interests of the minor and advocate for those resources; and

(g) participate in all appeals unless excused by the court.

(13)(a) [The] Except as described in Subsection (13)(b), a private attorney guardian ad litem shall represent the best interests of a minor.

(b)(i) A private attorney guardian ad litem that is appointed to represent a minor that is 8 years old or older shall represent the minor's expressed interest.

(ii) A private attorney guardian ad litem that is representing a minor shall represent the minor's expressed interest after the minor turns 8 years old.

(c) At each hearing the private attorney guardian ad litem shall inform the court:

(i) of the minor's wishes and desired outcome;

(ii) whether the minor expressed a desire to be present at the hearing; and

(iii) of the date that the private attorney guardian ad litem most recently spoke with the minor, including whether the interaction was:

(A) directly with the minor client in person; or

(B) directly with the minor client through telephone, video, or writing.

~~[(b)]~~ (d) If the minor's intent and desires differ from the [private attorney guardian ad litem's determination of the] minor's best interests, the private attorney guardian ad litem shall [communicate to the court the minor's intent and desires and the private attorney guardian ad litem's determination of the minor's best interests] provide the basis for the private attorney guardian ad litem's determination to the court and the minor child.

~~[(e)]~~ (e) A difference between the minor's intent and desires and the private attorney guardian ad litem's determination of best interests is not sufficient to create a conflict of interest.

~~[(d)]~~ (f) The private attorney guardian ad litem shall disclose the intent and desires of the minor unless the minor:

(i) instructs the private attorney guardian ad litem to not disclose the minor's intent and desires; or

(ii) has not expressed an intent and desire.

~~[(e)]~~ (g) The court may appoint one private attorney guardian ad litem to represent the best interests of more than one child of a marriage.

(h) A minor child may request a change in an appointed private guardian ad litem

505 directly or through any party.

506 (14) In every court hearing where the private attorney guardian ad litem makes a
507 recommendation regarding the best interest of the minor, the court shall require the
508 private attorney guardian ad litem to disclose the activities and sources of the attorney
509 guardian ad litem's independent investigation and factors that form the basis of the
510 recommendation.

511 (15) A private attorney guardian ad litem appointed under this section is immune from any
512 civil liability that might result by reason of acts performed within the scope of duties of
513 the private attorney guardian ad litem.

514 (16) The office and the Guardian ad Litem Oversight Committee shall compile a list of
515 attorneys willing to accept an appointment as a private attorney guardian ad litem.

516 (17) Upon the advice of the director and the Guardian ad Litem Oversight Committee, the
517 Judicial Council shall establish by rule:

- 518 (a) the minimum qualifications and requirements for appointment by the court as a
519 private attorney guardian ad litem;
520 (b) the standard fee rate and retainer amount for a private attorney guardian ad litem;
521 (c) the percentage of cases a private attorney guardian ad litem may be expected to take
522 on pro bono;
523 (d) a system to:
524 (i) select a private attorney guardian ad litem for a given appointment; and
525 (ii) determine when a private attorney guardian ad litem shall be expected to accept
526 an appointment pro bono; and
527 (e) the process for handling a complaint relating to the eligibility status of a private
528 attorney guardian ad litem.

529 (18)(a) Any savings that result from assigning a private attorney guardian ad litem in a
530 district court case, instead of an office guardian ad litem, shall be applied to the office
531 to recruit and train attorneys for the private attorney guardian ad litem program.

532 (b) After complying with Subsection (18)(a), the office shall use any additional savings
533 to reduce caseloads and improve current practices in juvenile court.

534 (19)(a) A private attorney guardian ad litem shall respond to case-related discovery.

535 **(b) Interrogatories or requests for admissions may not be imposed on a minor.**

536 (20)(a) A private attorney guardian ad litem shall record, by video and audio, an
537 interaction with a minor child that is less than 14 years old.

538 **(b) A recording described in Subsection (20)(a) may be reviewed in camera by the judge**

in the matter.

(21)(a) A private attorney guardian ad litem should make a best interest recommendation based on the private attorney guardian ad litem's direct knowledge and personal investigation.

(b) The Office of Guardian ad Litem director or a managing attorney may not direct a private attorney guardian ad litem to take a certain position or make a particular recommendation.

Section 7. Section **78A-2-801** is amended to read:

78A-2-801 . Definitions.

(1) As used in this part:

[(1)] (a) "Abuse, neglect, or dependency petition" means the same as that term is defined in Section 80-3-102.

[(2)] (b) "Attorney guardian ad litem" means an attorney employed by the office.

[(3)] (c) "Director" means the director of the office.

[(4)] (d) "Division" means the Division of Child and Family Services created in Section 80-2-201.

[(5)] (e) "Guardian ad litem" means an attorney guardian ad litem or a private attorney guardian ad litem.

[(6)] (f) "Indigent individual" means the same as that term is defined in Section 78B-22-102.

[(7)] (g) "Minor" means the same as that term is defined in Section 80-1-102.

[(8)] (h) "Office" means the Office of Guardian Ad Litem created in Section 78A-2-802.

[(9)] (i) "Private attorney guardian ad litem" means an attorney designated by the office in accordance with Section 78A-2-705 who is not an employee of the office.

(2) A determination of a minor's best interest under this part shall be made in accordance with Sections 80-2a-201, 80-4-104, and any other section of this title consistent with those sections.

Section 8. Section **78A-2-802** is amended to read:

78A-2-802 . Office of Guardian ad Litem -- Appointment of director -- Duties of director -- Contracts in second, third, and fourth districts.

(1) There is created the Office of Guardian [Að] ad Litem under the direct supervision of the Guardian [Að] ad Litem Oversight Committee described in [Subsection 78A-2-104(14)] Section 78A-2-104.5.

(2)(a) The Guardian [Að] ad Litem Oversight Committee shall appoint one individual to

573 serve full time as the guardian ad litem director for the state.

574 (b) The guardian ad litem director shall:

- 575 (i) serve at the pleasure of the Guardian [Ad] ad Litem Oversight Committee, in
576 consultation with the state court administrator;
- 577 (ii) be an attorney licensed to practice law in this state and selected on the basis of:
578 (A) professional ability;
579 (B) experience in abuse, neglect, and dependency proceedings;
580 (C) familiarity with the role, purpose, and function of guardians ad litem in both
581 juvenile and district courts; and
582 (D) ability to develop training curricula and reliable methods for data collection
583 and evaluation; and
584 (iii) before or immediately after the director's appointment, be trained in nationally
585 recognized standards for an attorney guardian ad litem.

586 (3) The guardian ad litem director shall:

- 587 (a) establish policy and procedure for the management of a statewide guardian ad litem
588 program;
- 589 (b) manage the guardian ad litem program to assure that a minor receives qualified
590 guardian ad litem services in an abuse, neglect, or dependency proceeding under Title
591 80, Chapter 3, Abuse, Neglect, and Dependency Proceedings, in accordance with
592 state and federal law and policy;
- 593 (c) develop standards for contracts of employment and contracts with independent
594 contractors, and employ or contract with attorneys licensed to practice law in this
595 state, to act as attorney guardians ad litem in accordance with Section 78A-2-803;
- 596 (d) develop and provide training programs for volunteers in accordance with the United
597 States Department of Justice National Court Appointed Special Advocates
598 Association standards;
- 599 (e) develop, publish, and update a guardian ad litem manual that includes:
600 (i) best practices for an attorney guardian ad litem; and
601 (ii) statutory and case law relating to an attorney guardian ad litem;
- 602 (f) develop and provide a library of materials for the continuing education of attorney
603 guardians ad litem and volunteers;
- 604 (g) educate court personnel regarding the role and function of guardians ad litem;
- 605 (h) develop needs assessment strategies, perform needs assessment surveys, and ensure
606 that guardian ad litem training programs correspond with actual and perceived needs

for training;

(i) design and implement evaluation tools based on specific objectives targeted in the needs assessments described in Subsection (3)(h);

(j) evaluate the performance of attorney guardians ad litem and private guardians ad litem, including tracking the frequency of a guardian ad litem's interactions with a minor client and whether the interaction was:

(i) directly with the minor client in person;

(ii) directly with the minor client through telephone, video, or writing; or

(iii) indirectly with the minor through an assigned trained volunteer, in accordance with Section 78A-2-803;

~~[(j)]~~ (k) prepare and submit an annual report to the Guardian ad Litem Oversight Committee and the Child Welfare Legislative Oversight Panel created in Section 36-33-102 regarding:

(i) the development, policy, and management of the statewide guardian ad litem program;

(ii) the training and evaluation of attorney guardians ad litem and volunteers, including needs assessment surveys and evaluation tools described in Subsections (3)(h) and (i);

(iii) specific action the director has taken to:

(A) confirm that minor clients receive qualified guardian ad litem services; and

(B) audit and review cases assigned to the office for statutory compliance, best practices, and outcomes;

(iv) guardians ad litem client interaction data; and

~~[(iii)]~~ (v) the number of minors served by the office;

~~[(k)]~~ (l) hire, train, and supervise investigators; and

~~[(h)]~~ (m) administer the program of private attorney guardians ad litem established under Section 78A-2-705.

(4) A contract of employment or independent contract described in Subsection (3)(c) shall provide that an attorney guardian ad litem in the second, third, and fourth judicial districts devote the attorney guardian's ad litem full time and attention to the role of attorney guardian ad litem, having no clients other than the minors whose interest the attorney guardian ad litem represents within the guardian ad litem program.

Section 9. Section **78A-2-803** is amended to read:

78A-2-803 . Appointment of attorney guardian ad litem -- Duties and

**responsibilities -- Training -- Trained staff and court-appointed special advocate
volunteers -- Costs -- Immunity -- Annual report.**

(1)(a) The court:

~~[(i) may appoint an attorney guardian ad litem to represent the best interest of a minor
involved in any case before the court; and]~~

~~[(ii)]~~ (i) may appoint an attorney guardian ad litem to represent the best interest of a
minor child that is less than 8 years old that has been removed from the custody of
the minor child's parent or guardian;

(ii) may appoint an attorney guardian ad litem to represent the expressed interest of a
minor child that is 8 years old or older that has been removed from the custody of
the minor child's parent or guardian; and

(iii) shall consider the best interest of a minor, consistent with the provisions of
Section 80-2a-201, in determining whether to appoint a guardian ad litem.

(b) In all cases where an attorney guardian ad litem is appointed, the court shall make a
finding that establishes the necessity of the appointment within seven days of the
appointment.

(2) ~~[An]~~ Following appointment by the court, an attorney guardian ad litem shall represent
the best interest of each minor who ~~[may become]~~ is the subject of an abuse, neglect, or
dependency petition~~[from the earlier of:]~~ .

~~[(a) the day on which the minor is removed from the minor's home by the division; or]~~

~~[(b) the day on which the abuse, neglect, or dependency petition is filed.]~~

(3) The director shall ensure that each attorney guardian ad litem employed by the office:

(a) represents the best interest of each client of the office in all venues, including:

(i) court proceedings; and

(ii) meetings to develop, review, or modify the child and family plan with the
division in accordance with Section 80-3-307;

(b) before representing any minor before the court, be trained in:

(i) applicable statutory, regulatory, and case law; and

(ii) nationally recognized standards for an attorney guardian ad litem;

(c) conducts or supervises an ongoing, independent investigation in order to obtain,
first-hand, a clear understanding of the situation~~[and]~~ , needs, and wishes of the
minor;

(d)(i) personally meets with the minor, unless:

(A) the minor is outside of the state; or

- 675 (B) meeting with the minor would be detrimental to the minor;
- 676 (ii) personally interviews the minor, unless:
- 677 (A) the minor is not old enough to communicate;
- 678 (B) the minor lacks the capacity to participate in a meaningful interview; or
- 679 (C) the interview would be detrimental to the minor; and
- 680 (iii) if the minor is placed in an out-of-home placement, or is being considered for
- 681 placement in an out-of-home placement, unless it would be detrimental to the
- 682 minor[;]
- 683 [(A)] to the extent possible, determines the minor's goals and concerns regarding
- 684 placement[; and] ;
- 685 ~~[(B) personally assesses or supervises an assessment of the appropriateness and~~
- 686 ~~safety of the minor's environment in each placement;]~~
- 687 (e) personally attends all review hearings pertaining to the minor's case;
- 688 (f) participates in all appeals, unless excused by order of the court;
- 689 (g) is familiar with local experts who can provide consultation and testimony regarding
- 690 the reasonableness and appropriateness of efforts made by the division to:
- 691 (i) maintain a minor in the minor's home; or
- 692 (ii) reunify a minor with a minor's parent;
- 693 (h) to the extent possible, and unless it would be detrimental to the minor, personally or
- 694 through a trained volunteer, paralegal, or other trained staff, keeps the minor advised
- 695 of:
- 696 (i) the status of the minor's case;
- 697 (ii) all court and administrative proceedings;
- 698 (iii) discussions with, and proposals made by, other parties;
- 699 (iv) court action; and
- 700 (v) the psychiatric, medical, or other treatment or diagnostic services that are to be
- 701 provided to the minor;
- 702 (i) in cases where a child and family plan is required, personally or through a trained
- 703 volunteer, paralegal, or other trained staff, monitors implementation of a minor's
- 704 child and family plan and any dispositional orders to:
- 705 (i) determine whether services ordered by the court:
- 706 (A) are actually provided; and
- 707 (B) are provided in a timely manner; and
- 708 (ii) ~~[attempt to]~~assess whether services ~~[ordered by the court are accomplishing the~~

intended goal of the services] provided by the division are accomplishing the goals ordered by the court; and

(j) makes all necessary court filings to advance the [guardian's ad litem position regarding the best interest of the minor] orders and established goals of the court.

(4)(a) Consistent with this Subsection (4), an attorney guardian ad litem may use trained volunteers, in accordance with Title 67, Chapter 20, Volunteer Government Workers Act, trained paralegals, and other trained staff to assist in investigation and preparation of information regarding the cases of individual minors before the court.

(b) A volunteer, paralegal, or other staff utilized under this section shall be trained in and follow, at a minimum, the guidelines established by the United States Department of Justice Court Appointed Special Advocates Association.

(5) The attorney guardian ad litem shall continue to represent the best interest of the minor until released from that duty by the court.

(6)(a) Consistent with Subsection (6)(b), the juvenile court is responsible for:

- (i) all costs resulting from the appointment of an attorney guardian ad litem; and
- (ii) the costs of volunteer, paralegal, and other staff appointment and training.

(b) The court shall use funds appropriated by the Legislature for the guardian ad litem program to cover the costs described in Subsection (6)(a).

(c)(i) When the court appoints an attorney guardian ad litem under this section, the court may assess all or part of the attorney fees, court costs, and paralegal, staff, and volunteer expenses against the minor's parents, parent, or legal guardian in a proportion that the court determines to be just and appropriate, taking into consideration costs already borne by the parents, parent, or legal guardian, including:

- (A) private attorney fees;
- (B) counseling for the minor;
- (C) counseling for the parent, if mandated by the court or recommended by the division; and
- (D) any other cost the court determines to be relevant.

(ii) The court may not assess the fees or costs described in Subsection (6)(c)(i) against:

- (A) a legal guardian, when that guardian is the state; or
- (B) consistent with Subsection (6)(d), a parent who is found to be an indigent individual.

(d) For purposes of Subsection (6)(c)(ii)(B), if an individual claims to be an indigent individual, the court shall:

(i) require the individual to submit an affidavit of indigency as provided in Section 78A-2-302; and

(ii) follow the procedures and make the determinations as provided in Section 78A-2-304.

(e) The minor's parents, parent, or legal guardian may appeal the court's determination, under Subsection (6)(c), of fees, costs, and expenses.

(7) An attorney guardian ad litem appointed under this section, when serving in the scope of the attorney guardian's ad litem duties as guardian ad litem is considered an employee of the state for purposes of indemnification under Title 63G, Chapter 7, Governmental Immunity Act of Utah.

(8)(a) ~~[An]~~ Except as described in Subsection (8)(b), an attorney guardian ad litem shall represent the best interest of a minor.

(b)(i) An attorney guardian ad litem that is appointed to represent a minor that is 8 years old or older shall represent the minor's expressed interest.

(ii) An attorney guardian ad litem that is representing a minor shall represent the minor's expressed interest after the minor turns 8 years old.

(c) At each hearing the attorney guardian ad litem shall inform the court:

(i) of the minor's wishes and desired outcome;

(ii) whether the minor expressed a desire to be present at the hearing; and

(iii) of the date that the attorney guardian ad litem most recently spoke with the minor, including whether the interaction was:

(A) directly with the minor client in person;

(B) directly with the minor client through telephone, video, or writing; or

(C) indirectly with the minor through an assigned trained volunteer, in accordance with Subsection (4).

~~[(b)]~~ (d) If the minor's expressed wishes differ from the [attorney's determination of the] minor's best interest, the attorney guardian ad litem shall [communicate the minor's wishes to the court in addition to presenting the attorney's determination of the minor's best interest] provide the basis for the attorney's determination to the court and the minor child.

~~[(e)]~~ (e) A difference between the minor's wishes and the attorney's determination of best interest may not be considered a conflict of interest for the attorney.

777 ~~[(d)]~~ (f) The guardian ad litem shall disclose the wishes of the minor unless the minor:

778 (i) instructs the guardian ad litem to not disclose the minor's wishes; or

779 (ii) has not expressed any wishes.

780 ~~[(e)]~~ (g) The court may appoint one attorney guardian ad litem to represent the best

781 interests of more than one minor of a marriage.

782 (h) A minor child may request a change in an appointed guardian ad litem directly or
783 through any party.

784 (9) The division shall provide an attorney guardian ad litem access to all division records
785 regarding the minor at issue and the minor's family.

786 (10)(a) An attorney guardian ad litem shall conduct an independent investigation
787 regarding the minor at issue, the minor's family, and what is in the best interest of the
788 minor.

789 (b) An attorney guardian ad litem may interview the minor's child welfare caseworker,
790 but may not:

791 (i) rely exclusively on the conclusions and findings of the division; or

792 (ii) except as provided in Subsection (10)(c), conduct a visit with the client in
793 conjunction with the visit of a child welfare caseworker.

794 (c)(i) An attorney guardian ad litem may meet with a client during a team meeting,
795 court hearing, or similar venue when a child welfare caseworker is present for a
796 purpose other than the attorney guardian ad litem's meeting with the client.

797 (ii) A party and the party's counsel may attend a team meeting in accordance with the
798 Utah Rules of Professional Conduct.

799 (11)(a) An attorney guardian ad litem shall maintain current and accurate records
800 regarding:

801 (i) the number of times the attorney has had contact with each minor; and

802 (ii) the actions the attorney has taken in representation of the minor's best interest.

803 (b) In every hearing where the attorney guardian ad litem makes a recommendation
804 regarding the best interest of the minor, the court shall require the attorney guardian
805 ad litem to disclose the activities and sources of the attorney guardian ad litem's
806 independent investigation and factors that form the basis of the recommendation.

807 (12)(a) Except as provided in Subsection (12)(b), and notwithstanding Title 63G,
808 Chapter 2, Government Records Access and Management Act, all records of an
809 attorney guardian ad litem are confidential and may not be released or made public
810 upon subpoena, search warrant, discovery proceedings, or otherwise.

(b) Consistent with Subsection (12)(d), all records of an attorney guardian ad litem:

(i) are subject to legislative subpoena, under Title 36, Chapter 14, Legislative Subpoena Powers; and

(ii) shall be released to the Legislature.

(c)(i) Except as provided in Subsection (12)(c)(ii), the Legislature shall maintain records released in accordance with Subsection (12)(b) as confidential.

(ii) Notwithstanding Subsection (12)(c)(i), the Office of the Legislative Auditor General may include summary data and nonidentifying information in the office's audits and reports to the Legislature.

(d)(i) Subsection (12)(b) is an exception to Rules of Professional Conduct, Rule 1.6, as provided by Rule 1.6(b)(4), because of:

(A) the unique role of an attorney guardian ad litem described in Subsection (8); and

(B) the state's role and responsibility to provide a guardian ad litem program, and as parens patriae, to protect minors.

(ii) A claim of attorney-client privilege does not bar access to the records of an attorney guardian ad litem by the Legislature, through legislative subpoena.

(13)(a) An attorney guardian ad litem shall respond to case-related discovery.

(b) Interrogatories or requests for admissions may not be imposed on a minor.

(14)(a) An attorney guardian ad litem shall record, by video and audio, an interaction with a minor child that is less than 14 years old.

(b) A recording described in Subsection (14)(a) may be reviewed in camera by the judge in the matter.

(15)(a) An attorney guardian ad litem should make a best interest recommendation based on the attorney guardian ad litem's direct knowledge and personal investigation.

(b) The Office of Guardian ad Litem director or a managing attorney may not direct an attorney guardian ad litem to take a certain position or make a particular recommendation.

Section 10. Section **80-2-102** is amended to read:

80-2-102 . Definitions.

(1) As used in this chapter:

[(+)] (a) "Consult" means an interaction between two persons in which the initiating person:

[(a)] (i) provides information to another person;

845 ~~[(b)]~~ (ii) provides the other person an opportunity to respond; and
846 ~~[(e)]~~ (iii) takes the other person's response, if any, into consideration.

847 ~~[(2)]~~ (b) "Consumer" means a person who receives services offered by the division in
848 accordance with this chapter.

849 ~~[(3)]~~ (c) "Council" means the Child Welfare Improvement Council created in Section
850 80-2-1101.

851 ~~[(4)]~~ (d) "Custody," with regard to the division, means the custody of a minor in the
852 division as of the date of disposition.

853 ~~[(5)]~~ (e) "Day-care services" means care of a child for a portion of the day which is less
854 than 24 hours:

855 ~~[(a)]~~ (i) in the child's own home by a responsible individual; or
856 ~~[(b)]~~ (ii) outside of the child's home in a:

857 ~~[(i)]~~ (A) day-care center;
858 ~~[(ii)]~~ (B) family group home; or
859 ~~[(iii)]~~ (C) family child care home.

860 ~~[(6)]~~ (f) "Director" means the director of the division appointed under Section 80-2-202.

861 ~~[(7)]~~ (g) "Division" means the Division of Child and Family Services created in Section
862 80-2-201.

863 ~~[(8)]~~ (h) "Domestic violence" means the same as that term is defined in Section 77-36-1.

864 ~~[(9)]~~ (i) "Domestic violence services" means:

865 ~~[(a)]~~ (i) temporary shelter, treatment, and related services provided to:

866 ~~[(i)]~~ (A) an individual who is a victim of abuse, as defined in Section 78B-7-102;
867 and
868 ~~[(ii)]~~ (B) the dependent children of an individual who is a victim of abuse, as
869 defined in Section 78B-7-102; and

870 ~~[(b)]~~ (ii) treatment services for an individual who is alleged to have committed, has
871 been convicted of, or has pled guilty to domestic violence.

872 ~~[(10)]~~ (j) "Homemaking services" means the care of an individual in the individual's
873 domicile, and help given to an individual caretaker relative to achieve improved
874 household and family management through the services of a trained homemaker.

875 ~~[(11)]~~ (k) "Hormonal transgender treatment" means the same as that term is defined in
876 Section 58-1-603.

877 ~~[(12)]~~ (l) "Mutual case" means a case that is:

878 ~~[(a)]~~ (i) opened by the division under the division's discretion and procedures;

~~[(b)]~~ (ii) opened by the law enforcement agency with jurisdiction over the case; and
~~[(e)]~~ (iii) accepted for investigation by a child protection team, as applicable.

~~[(13)]~~ ~~(m)~~~~[(a)]~~ (i) "Person responsible for the child's care" means the child's parent, guardian, or other person responsible for the child's care.

~~[(b)]~~ (ii) "Person responsible for the child's care" includes a person responsible for the child's care in the same home as the child, a relative's home, a group, family, or day care facility, a foster care home, or a residential institution.

~~[(14)]~~ ~~(n)~~ "Primary sex characteristic surgical procedure" means the same as that term is defined in Section 58-67-102.

~~[(15)]~~ ~~(o)~~ "Secondary sex characteristic surgical procedure" means the same as that term is defined in Section 58-67-102.

~~[(16)]~~ ~~(p)~~ "Shelter care" means the temporary care of a minor in a nonsecure facility.

~~[(17)]~~ ~~(q)~~ "Sibling" means a child who shares or has shared at least one parent in common either by blood or adoption.

~~[(18)]~~ ~~(r)~~ "Sibling visitation" means services provided by the division to facilitate the interaction between a child in division custody with the child's sibling.

~~[(19)]~~ ~~(s)~~~~[(a)]~~ (i) "Subject of the report" means a person reported under Part 6, Child Abuse and Neglect Reports.

~~[(b)]~~ (ii) "Subject of the report" includes the child who is the alleged victim of the report and the person responsible for the child's care.

~~[(20)]~~ ~~(t)~~ "Temporary custody" means, with regard to the division, the custody of a child from the day on which the shelter hearing described in Section 80-3-301 is held until the day on which the juvenile court enters a disposition under Section 80-3-405.

~~[(21)]~~ ~~(u)~~ "Transportation services" means travel assistance given to an individual with escort service, if necessary, to and from community facilities and resources as part of a service plan.

(2) A determination of a minor's best interest under this chapter shall be made in accordance with Sections 80-2a-201, 80-4-104, and any other section of this title consistent with those sections.

Section 11. Section **80-2-301** is amended to read:

80-2-301 . Division responsibilities.

(1) The division is the child, youth, and family services authority of the state.

(2) The division shall:

(a) administer services to minors and families, including:

- 913 (i) child welfare services;
- 914 (ii) domestic violence services; and
- 915 (iii) all other responsibilities that the Legislature or the executive director of the
- 916 department may assign to the division;
- 917 (b) provide the following services:
- 918 (i) financial and other assistance to an individual adopting a child with special needs
- 919 under Sections 80-2-806 through 80-2-809, not to exceed the amount the division
- 920 would provide for the child as a legal ward of the state;
- 921 (ii) non-custodial and in-home services in accordance with Section 80-2-306,
- 922 including:
- 923 (A) services designed to prevent family break-up; and
- 924 (B) family preservation services;
- 925 (iii) reunification services to families whose children are in substitute care in
- 926 accordance with this chapter, Chapter 2a, Removal and Protective Custody of a
- 927 Child, and Chapter 3, Abuse, Neglect, and Dependency Proceedings;
- 928 (iv) protective supervision of a family, upon court order, in an effort to eliminate
- 929 abuse or neglect of a child in that family;
- 930 (v) shelter care in accordance with this chapter, Chapter 2a, Removal and Protective
- 931 Custody of a Child, and Chapter 3, Abuse, Neglect, and Dependency Proceedings;
- 932 (vi) domestic violence services, in accordance with the requirements of federal law;
- 933 (vii) protective services to victims of domestic violence and the victims' children, in
- 934 accordance with this chapter, Chapter 2a, Removal and Protective Custody of a
- 935 Child, and Chapter 3, Abuse, Neglect, and Dependency Proceedings;
- 936 (viii) substitute care for dependent, abused, and neglected children;
- 937 (ix) services for minors who are victims of human trafficking or human smuggling,
- 938 as described in Sections 76-5-308 through 76-5-310.1, or who have engaged in
- 939 prostitution or sexual solicitation, as defined in Sections 76-5d-202 and 76-5d-209;
- 940 and
- 941 (x) training for staff and providers involved in the administration and delivery of
- 942 services offered by the division in accordance with this chapter and Chapter 2a,
- 943 Removal and Protective Custody of a Child;
- 944 (c) establish standards for all:
- 945 (i) contract providers of out-of-home care for minors and families;
- 946 (ii) facilities that provide substitute care for dependent, abused, or neglected children

- 947 placed in the custody of the division; and
- 948 (iii) direct or contract providers of domestic violence services described in
- 949 Subsection (2)(b)(vi);
- 950 (d) have authority to:
- 951 (i) contract with a private, nonprofit organization to recruit and train foster care
- 952 families and child welfare volunteers in accordance with Section 80-2-405;
- 953 (ii) approve facilities that meet the standards established under Subsection (2)(c) to
- 954 provide substitute care for dependent, abused, or neglected children placed in the
- 955 custody of the division; and
- 956 (iii) approve an individual to provide short-term relief care to a foster parent if the
- 957 individual:
- 958 (A) provides the relief care for less than six consecutive nights;
- 959 (B) provides the relief care in the short-term relief care provider's home;
- 960 (C) is direct access qualified, as that term is defined in Section 26B-2-120; and
- 961 (D) is an immediate family member or relative, as those terms are defined in
- 962 Section 80-3-102, of the foster parent;
- 963 (e) cooperate with the federal government in the administration of child welfare and
- 964 domestic violence programs and other human service activities assigned by the
- 965 department;
- 966 (f) in accordance with Subsection (5)(a), promote and enforce state and federal laws
- 967 enacted for the protection of abused, neglected, or dependent children, in accordance
- 968 with this chapter and Chapter 2a, Removal and Protective Custody of a Child, unless
- 969 administration is expressly vested in another division or department of the state;
- 970 (g) cooperate with the Workforce Development Division within the Department of
- 971 Workforce Services in meeting the social and economic needs of an individual who is
- 972 eligible for public assistance;
- 973 (h) compile relevant information, statistics, and reports on child and family service
- 974 matters in the state;
- 975 (i) prepare and submit to the department, the governor, and the Legislature reports of the
- 976 operation and administration of the division in accordance with the requirements of
- 977 Sections 80-2-1102 and 80-2-1103;
- 978 (j) within appropriations from the Legislature, provide or contract for a variety of
- 979 domestic violence services and treatment methods;
- 980 (k) enter into contracts for programs designed to reduce the occurrence or recurrence of

- 981 abuse and neglect in accordance with Section 80-2-503;
- 982 (l) seek reimbursement of funds the division expends on behalf of a child in the
- 983 protective custody, temporary custody, or custody of the division, from the child's
- 984 parent or guardian in accordance with an order for child support under Section
- 985 78A-6-356;
- 986 (m) ensure regular, periodic publication, including electronic publication, regarding the
- 987 number of children in the custody of the division who:
- 988 (i) have a permanency goal of adoption; or
- 989 (ii) have a final plan of termination of parental rights, under Section 80-3-409, and
- 990 promote adoption of the children;
- 991 (n) subject to Subsections (5) and (7), refer an individual receiving services from the
- 992 division to the local substance abuse authority or other private or public resource for
- 993 a court-ordered drug screening test;
- 994 (o) report before November 30, 2020, and every third year thereafter, to the Social
- 995 Services Appropriations Subcommittee regarding:
- 996 (i) the daily reimbursement rate that is provided to licensed foster parents based on
- 997 level of care;
- 998 (ii) the amount of money spent on daily reimbursements for licensed foster parents
- 999 during the previous fiscal year; and
- 1000 (iii) any recommended changes to the division's budget to support the daily
- 1001 reimbursement rates described in Subsection (2)(o)(i);
- 1002 (p) when a division child welfare caseworker identifies a safety concern with the foster
- 1003 home, cooperate with the Office of Licensing and make a recommendation to the
- 1004 Office of Licensing concerning whether the foster home's license should be placed on
- 1005 conditions, suspended, or revoked;[~~and~~]
- 1006 (q) provide an attorney that is representing a parent or guardian in a dependency,
- 1007 neglect, or abuse petition with access to division records regarding the parent or
- 1008 guardian or the parent or guardian's family; and
- 1009 [~~(q)~~] (r) perform other duties and functions required by law.
- 1010 (3)(a) The division may provide, directly or through contract, services that include the
- 1011 following:
- 1012 (i) adoptions;
- 1013 (ii) day-care services;
- 1014 (iii) out-of-home placements for minors;

- (iv) health-related services;
- (v) homemaking services;
- (vi) home management services;
- (vii) protective services for minors;
- (viii) transportation services; or
- (ix) domestic violence services.

(b) The division shall monitor services provided directly by the division or through contract to ensure compliance with applicable law and rules made in accordance with Title 63G, Chapter 3, Utah Administrative Rulemaking Act.

(c)(i) Except as provided in Subsection (3)(c)(ii), if the division provides a service through a private contract, the division shall post the name of the service provider on the division's website.

(ii) Subsection (3)(c)(i) does not apply to a foster parent placement.

(4)(a) The division may:

- (i) receive gifts, grants, devises, and donations;
- (ii) encourage merchants and service providers to:
 - (A) donate goods or services; or
 - (B) provide goods or services at a nominal price or below cost;
- (iii) distribute goods to applicants or consumers of division services free or for a nominal charge and tax free; and
- (iv) appeal to the public for funds to meet needs of applicants or consumers of division services that are not otherwise provided by law, including Sub-for-Santa programs, recreational programs for minors, and requests for household appliances and home repairs.

(b) If requested by the donor and subject to state and federal law, the division shall use a gift, grant, devise, donation, or proceeds from the gift, grant, devise, or donation for the purpose requested by the donor.

(5)(a) In carrying out the requirements of Subsection (2)(f), the division shall:

- (i) cooperate with the juvenile courts, the Division of Juvenile Justice and Youth Services, and with all public and private licensed child welfare agencies and institutions to develop and administer a broad range of services and support;
- (ii) take the initiative in all matters involving the protection of abused or neglected children, if adequate provisions have not been made or are not likely to be made; and

- 1049 (iii) make expenditures necessary for the care and protection of the children described
1050 in Subsection (5)(a)(ii), within the division's budget.
- 1051 (b) If an individual is referred to a local substance abuse authority or other private or
1052 public resource for court-ordered drug screening under Subsection (2)(n), the court
1053 shall order the individual to pay all costs of the tests unless:
- 1054 (i) the cost of the drug screening is specifically funded or provided for by other
1055 federal or state programs;
- 1056 (ii) the individual is a participant in a drug court; or
- 1057 (iii) the court finds that the individual is an indigent individual.
- 1058 (6) Except to the extent provided by rules made in accordance with Title 63G, Chapter 3,
1059 Utah Administrative Rulemaking Act, the division is not required to investigate
1060 domestic violence in the presence of a child, as described in Section 76-5-114.
- 1061 (7)(a) Except as provided in Subsection (7)(b), the division may not:
- 1062 (i) require a parent who has a child in the custody of the division to pay for some or
1063 all of the cost of any drug testing the parent is required to undergo; or
- 1064 (ii) refer an individual who is receiving services from the division for drug testing by
1065 means of a hair, fingernail, or saliva test that is administered to detect the presence
1066 of drugs.
- 1067 (b) Notwithstanding Subsection (7)(a)(ii), the division may refer an individual who is
1068 receiving services from the division for drug testing by means of a saliva test if:
- 1069 (i) the individual consents to drug testing by means of a saliva test; or
- 1070 (ii) the court, based on a finding that a saliva test is necessary in the circumstances,
1071 orders the individual to complete drug testing by means of a saliva test.
- 1072 Section 12. Section **80-2a-101** is amended to read:
- 1073 **80-2a-101 . Definitions.**
- 1074 (1) "Custody" means the same as that term is defined in Section 80-2-102.
- 1075 (2) "Division" means the Division of Child and Family Services created in Section 80-2-201.
- 1076 (3) "Friend" means an adult who:
- 1077 (a) has an established relationship with the child or a family member of the child; and
- 1078 (b) is not the parent of the child.
- 1079 (4) "Nonrelative" means an individual who is not a noncustodial parent or relative.
- 1080 (5) "Relative" means an adult who:
- 1081 (a) is the child's grandparent, great grandparent, aunt, great aunt, uncle, great uncle,
1082 brother-in-law, sister-in-law, stepparent, first cousin, stepsibling, or sibling;

- (b) is the first cousin of the child's parent;
- (c) is a permanent guardian or parent of the child's sibling; or
- (d) in the case of a child who is an Indian child, is an extended family member as defined in the Indian Child Welfare Act, 25 U.S.C. Sec. 1903.

(6) "Sibling" means the same as that term is defined in Section 80-2-102.

(7) "Temporary custody" means the same as that term is defined in Section 80-2-102.

(8) A determination of a minor's best interest under this chapter shall be made in accordance with Sections 80-2a-201, 80-4-104, and any other section of this title consistent with those sections.

Section 13. Section **80-3-102** is amended to read:

80-3-102 . Definitions.

(1) As used in this chapter:

~~[(1)]~~ (a) "Abuse, neglect, or dependency petition" means a petition filed in accordance with this chapter to commence proceedings in a juvenile court alleging that a child is:

~~[(a)]~~ (i) abused;

~~[(b)]~~ (ii) neglected; or

~~[(c)]~~ (iii) dependent.

~~[(2)]~~ (b) "Custody" means the same as that term is defined in Section 80-2-102.

~~[(3)]~~ (c) "Division" means the Division of Child and Family Services created in Section 80-2-201.

~~[(4)]~~ (d) "Friend" means an adult who:

~~[(a)]~~ (i) has an established relationship with the child or a family member of the child; and

~~[(b)]~~ (ii) is not the parent of the child.

~~[(5)]~~ (e) "Immediate family member" means a spouse, child, parent, sibling, grandparent, or grandchild.

~~[(6)]~~ (f) "Relative" means an adult who:

~~[(a)]~~ (i) is the child's grandparent, great grandparent, aunt, great aunt, uncle, great uncle, brother-in-law, sister-in-law, stepparent, first cousin, stepsibling, or sibling;

~~[(b)]~~ (ii) is a first cousin of the child's parent;

~~[(c)]~~ (iii) is a permanent guardian or parent of the child's sibling; or

~~[(d)]~~ (iv) in the case of a child who is an Indian child, is an extended family member as defined in the Indian Child Welfare Act, 25 U.S.C. Sec. 1903.

~~[(7)]~~ (g) "Sibling" means the same as that term is defined in Section 80-2-102.

1117 [(8)] (h) "Sibling visitation" means the same as that term is defined in Section 80-2-102.

1118 [(9)] (i) "Temporary custody" means the same as that term is defined in Section 80-2-102.

1119 (2) A determination of a minor's best interest under this chapter shall be made in
1120 accordance with Sections 80-2a-201, 80-4-104, and any other section of this title
1121 consistent with those sections.

1122 Section 14. Section **80-3-104** is amended to read:

1123 **80-3-104 . Individuals entitled to be present at proceedings -- Legal**
1124 **representation -- Attorney general responsibilities.**

1125 (1)(a) A minor who is the subject of a juvenile court hearing, any person entitled to
1126 notice under Section 80-3-201 or 80-3-301, preadoptive parents, foster parents, and
1127 any relative providing care for the minor, are:

1128 (i) entitled to notice of, and to be present at, each hearing and proceeding held under
1129 this chapter, including administrative reviews; and

1130 (ii) have a right to be heard at each hearing and proceeding described in Subsection
1131 (1)(a)(i).

1132 (b) A child's right to be present at a hearing under Subsection (1)(a) is subject to the
1133 discretion of the guardian ad litem appointed under Subsection (3) or the juvenile
1134 court regarding any possible detriment to the child.

1135 (2)(a) The parent or guardian of a minor who is the subject of an abuse, neglect, or
1136 dependency petition has the right to be represented by counsel, and to present
1137 evidence, at each hearing.

1138 (b) If a parent or guardian is the subject of an abuse, neglect, or dependency petition, the
1139 juvenile court shall:

1140 (i) appoint an indigent defense service provider for a parent or guardian determined
1141 to be an indigent individual in accordance with Title 78B, Chapter 22, Part 2,
1142 Appointment of Counsel; and

1143 (ii) order indigent defense services for the parent or guardian who is determined to be
1144 an indigent individual in accordance with Title 78B, Chapter 22, Part 2,
1145 Appointment of Counsel.

1146 (3)(a) In an abuse, neglect, or dependency proceeding under this chapter, the juvenile
1147 court shall order that the child be represented by an attorney guardian ad litem, in
1148 accordance with Section 78A-2-803.

1149 (b) A guardian ad litem appointed under Subsection (3)(a) shall represent the best
1150 interest of the minor, in accordance with the requirements of Section 78A-2-803:

- 1151 (i) at the shelter hearing and at all subsequent court and administrative proceedings,
1152 including any proceeding for termination of parental rights in accordance with
1153 Chapter 4, Termination and Restoration of Parental Rights; and
1154 (ii) in other actions initiated under this chapter when appointed by the court under
1155 Section 78A-2-803 or as otherwise provided by law.
- 1156 (4) Subject to Section 67-5-17 and the attorney general's prosecutorial discretion in civil
1157 enforcement actions, the attorney general shall, in accordance with Section 80-2-303,
1158 enforce this chapter, Chapter 2, Child Welfare Services, and Chapter 2a, Removal and
1159 Protective Custody of a Child, relating to protection or custody of an abused, neglected,
1160 or dependent minor and the termination of parental rights.
- 1161 (5)(a) The juvenile court shall admit any individual to a hearing under this chapter,
1162 including a hearing under Section 80-3-205, unless the juvenile court makes a finding
1163 upon the record that the individual's presence at the hearing would:
- 1164 (i) be detrimental to the best interest of a minor who is a party to the proceeding;
1165 (ii) impair the fact-finding process; or
1166 (iii) be otherwise contrary to the interests of justice.
- 1167 (b) The juvenile court may exclude an individual from a hearing under Subsection (5)(a)
1168 on the juvenile court's own motion or by motion of a party to the proceeding.
- 1169 (6) A determination of a minor's best interest under this chapter shall be made in
1170 accordance with Sections 80-2a-201, 80-4-104, and any other section of this title
1171 consistent with those sections.
- 1172 Section 15. Section **80-4-102** is amended to read:
1173 **80-4-102 . Definitions.**
- 1174 (1) As used in this chapter:
- 1175 [(1)] (a) "Division" means the Division of Child and Family Services created in Section
1176 80-2-201.
- 1177 [(2)] (b) "Failure of parental adjustment" means that a parent or parents are unable or
1178 unwilling within a reasonable time to substantially correct the circumstances,
1179 conduct, or conditions that led to placement of their child outside of their home,
1180 notwithstanding reasonable and appropriate efforts made by the division to return the
1181 child to the home.
- 1182 [(3)] (c) "Former parent" means an individual whose legal parental rights were
1183 terminated under this chapter.
- 1184 [(4)] (d) "Petition to restore parental rights" means a petition filed in accordance with this

chapter to restore the rights of a parent with regard to a child.

[(5)] (e) "Petition for termination of parental rights" means a petition filed in accordance with this chapter to terminate the parental rights of a parent.

[(6)] (f) "Temporary custody" means the same as that term is defined in Section 80-2-102.

(2) A determination of a minor's best interest under this chapter shall be made in accordance with Sections 80-2a-201, 80-4-104, and any other section of this title consistent with those sections.

Section 16. Section **81-13-202** is amended to read:

81-13-202 . Legislative findings -- Best interest of the minor child -- Interests of each party.

(1)(a) In every adoption of a minor child that, the best interest of the minor child should govern and be of foremost concern in a court's determination.

(b) A determination of a minor child's best interest shall be made in accordance with Sections 80-2a-201, 80-4-104, and any other section of this title consistent with those sections.

(2) The court shall make a specific finding regarding the best interest of the minor child, taking into consideration information provided to the court [~~pursuant to~~] in accordance with the requirements of this chapter relating to the health, safety, and welfare of the minor child and the moral climate of the potential adoptive placement.

(3) The Legislature finds that the rights and interests of all parties affected by an adoption proceeding [~~must~~] shall be considered and balanced in determining what constitutional protections and processes are necessary and appropriate.

(4)(a) The Legislature specifically finds that it is not in a minor child's best interest to be adopted by a person or persons who are cohabiting in a relationship that is not a legally valid and binding marriage under the laws of this state.

(b) Nothing in this section limits or prohibits the court's placement of a minor child with a single adult who is not cohabiting or a person who is a relative of the minor child or a recognized placement under the Indian Child Welfare Act, 25 U.S.C. Sec. 1901 et seq.

(5) The Legislature also finds that:

(a) the state has a compelling interest in providing a stable and permanent home for a child adoptee in a prompt manner, in preventing the disruption of an adoptive placement, and in holding parents accountable for meeting the needs of a child adoptee;

- 1219 (b) an unmarried birth mother, faced with the responsibility of making crucial decisions
1220 about the future of a newborn child, is entitled to privacy, and has the right to make
1221 timely and appropriate decisions regarding her future and the future of the newborn
1222 child, and is entitled to assurance regarding the permanence of an adoptive placement;
1223 (c) a child adoptee has a right to permanence and stability in an adoptive placement;
1224 (d) adoptive parents have a constitutionally protected liberty and privacy interest in
1225 retaining custody of a child adoptee;
1226 (e) an unmarried biological father has an inchoate interest that acquires constitutional
1227 protection only when the unmarried biological father demonstrates a timely and full
1228 commitment to the responsibilities of parenthood, both during pregnancy and upon
1229 the child adoptee's birth; and
1230 (f) the state has a compelling interest in requiring an unmarried biological father to
1231 demonstrate commitment by providing appropriate medical care and financial
1232 support and by establishing legal parentage in accordance with the requirements of
1233 this chapter.

1234 (6)(a) In enacting this chapter, the Legislature has prescribed the conditions for
1235 determining whether an unmarried biological father's action is sufficiently prompt
1236 and substantial to require constitutional protection.

- 1237 (b) If an unmarried biological father fails to grasp the opportunities to establish a
1238 relationship with the child adoptee that are available to the unmarried biological
1239 father, the unmarried biological father's parental interest may be lost entirely, or
1240 greatly diminished in constitutional significance by the unmarried biological father's
1241 failure to timely exercise the unmarried biological father's parental interest, or by the
1242 unmarried biological father's failure to strictly comply with the available legal steps
1243 to substantiate the parental interest.

1244 (c)(i) A certain degree of finality is necessary in order to facilitate the state's
1245 compelling interest.

- 1246 (ii) The Legislature finds that the interests of the state, the birth mother, the child
1247 adoptee, and the adoptive parents described in this section outweigh the interest of
1248 an unmarried biological father who does not timely grasp the opportunity to
1249 establish and demonstrate a relationship with the child adoptee in accordance with
1250 the requirements of this chapter.

1251 (d)(i) The Legislature finds no practical way to remove all risk of fraud or
1252 misrepresentation in adoption proceedings, and has provided a method for

absolute protection of an unmarried biological father's rights by compliance with the provisions of this chapter.

(ii) In balancing the rights and interests of the state, and of all parties affected by fraud, specifically the child adoptee, the adoptive parents, and the unmarried biological father, the Legislature has determined that the unmarried biological father is in the best position to prevent or ameliorate the effects of fraud and that, therefore, the burden of fraud shall be borne by the unmarried biological father.

(e) An unmarried biological father has the primary responsibility to protect the unmarried biological father's rights.

(f) An unmarried biological father is presumed to know that the child adoptee may be adopted without the unmarried biological father's consent unless the unmarried biological father strictly complies with the provisions of this chapter, manifests a prompt and full commitment to the unmarried biological father's parental responsibilities, and establishes paternity.

(7) The Legislature finds that an unmarried birth mother has:

- (a) a right of privacy with regard to the unmarried birth mother's pregnancy and adoption plan;
- (b) no legal obligation to disclose the identity of an unmarried biological father before or during an adoption proceeding; and
- (c) no obligation to volunteer information to the court with respect to the father.

Section 17. Effective Date.

This bill takes effect on May 6, 2026.