

## CHAPTER 518

### MARRIAGE DISSOLUTION

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#### 518.17 CUSTODY AND SUPPORT OF CHILDREN ON JUDGMENT.

Subdivision 1. **The best interests of the child.** (a) "The best interests of the child" means all relevant factors to be considered and evaluated by the court including:

- (1) the wishes of the child's parent or parents as to custody;
- (2) the reasonable preference of the child, if the court deems the child to be of sufficient age to express preference;
- (3) the child's primary caretaker;
- (4) the intimacy of the relationship between each parent and the child;
- (5) the interaction and interrelationship of the child with a parent or parents, siblings, and any other person who may significantly affect the child's best interests;
- (6) the child's adjustment to home, school, and community;
- (7) the length of time the child has lived in a stable, satisfactory environment and the desirability of maintaining continuity;
- (8) the permanence, as a family unit, of the existing or proposed custodial home;
- (9) the mental and physical health of all individuals involved;
- (10) the capacity and disposition of the parties to give the child love, affection, and guidance, and to continue educating and raising the child in the child's culture and religion or creed, if any;
- (11) the child's cultural background; and
- (12) the effect on the child of the actions of an abuser, if related to domestic abuse, as defined in section 518B.01, that has occurred between the parents.

The court may not use one factor to the exclusion of all others. The court must make detailed findings on each of the factors and explain how the factors led to its conclusions and to the determination of the best interests of the child.

(b) The court shall not consider conduct of a proposed custodian that does not affect the custodian's relationship to the child.

*[For text of subd 1a, see M.S.1988]*

Subd. 2. **Factors when joint custody is sought.** In addition to the factors listed in subdivision 1, where either joint legal or joint physical custody is contemplated or sought, the court shall consider the following relevant factors:

- (a) The ability of parents to cooperate in the rearing of their children;
- (b) Methods for resolving disputes regarding any major decision concerning the life of the child, and the parents' willingness to use those methods;
- (c) Whether it would be detrimental to the child if one parent were to have sole authority over the child's upbringing; and
- (d) Whether domestic abuse, as defined in section 518B.01, has occurred between the parents.

The court shall use a rebuttable presumption that upon request of either or both parties, joint legal custody is in the best interests of the child.

*[For text of subds 3 and 6, see M.S.1988]*

**History:** 1989 c 248 s 2,3

**518.175 VISITATION OF CHILDREN AND NONCUSTODIAL PARENT.**

Subdivision 1. In all proceedings for dissolution or legal separation, subsequent to the commencement of the proceeding and continuing thereafter during the minority of the child, the court shall, upon the request of either parent, grant such rights of visitation on behalf of the child and noncustodial parent as will enable the child and the noncustodial parent to maintain a child to parent relationship that will be in the best interests of the child. If the court finds, after a hearing, that visitation is likely to endanger the child's physical or emotional health or impair the child's emotional development, the court shall restrict visitation by the noncustodial parent as to time, place, duration, or supervision and may deny visitation entirely, as the circumstances warrant. The court shall consider the age of the child and the child's relationship with the noncustodial parent prior to the commencement of the proceeding. A parent's failure to pay support because of the parent's inability to do so shall not be sufficient cause for denial of visitation.

*[For text of subds 2 to 4, see M.S.1988]*

Subd. 5. The court shall modify an order granting or denying visitation rights whenever modification would serve the best interests of the child, but the court shall not restrict visitation rights unless it finds that:

- (1) the visitation is likely to endanger the child's physical or emotional health or impair the child's emotional development; or
- (2) the noncustodial parent has chronically and unreasonably failed to comply with court-ordered visitation.

If the custodial parent makes specific allegations that visitation places the custodial parent in danger of harm, the court shall hold a hearing at the earliest possible time to determine the need to modify the order granting visitation rights. The court may require a third party, including the county welfare board, to supervise the visitation or may restrict a parent's visitation rights if necessary to protect the custodial parent from harm.

*[For text of subds 6 and 7, see M.S.1988]*

**History:** 1989 c 248 s 4,5

**518.1751 VISITATION DISPUTE RESOLUTION.**

Subdivision 1. **Visitation expeditor.** (a) Upon agreement of all parties, the court may appoint a visitation expeditor to resolve visitation disputes that occur under a visitation order while a matter is pending under this chapter, chapter 257 or 518A, or after a decree is entered. Prior to appointing the visitation expeditor, the court shall give the parties notice that the costs of the visitation expeditor will be apportioned among the parties and that if the parties do not reach an agreement, the visitation expeditor will make a nonbinding decision resolving the dispute.

(b) For purposes of this section, "visitation dispute" means a disagreement among parties about visitation with a child. "Visitation dispute" includes a claim by a custodial parent that a noncustodial parent is not visiting a child as well as a claim by a noncustodial parent that a custodial parent is denying or interfering with visitation.

Subd. 2. **Appointment; costs.** The court shall appoint the visitation expeditor. If the parties cannot agree on a visitation expeditor, the court shall present a list of candidates with one more candidate than there are parties to the dispute. In developing the list of candidates, the court must give preference to persons who agree to volunteer their services. Each party shall strike one name and the court shall appoint the remaining individual as the visitation expeditor. In its order appointing the visitation expeditor, the court shall apportion the costs of the visitation expeditor among the parties, with each party bearing the portion of costs that the court determines is just and equitable under the circumstances.

Subd. 3. **Agreement or decision.** (a) If a visitation dispute arises, the visitation

expeditor shall meet with the parties within five days and make a diligent effort to facilitate an agreement to resolve the visitation dispute.

(b) If the parties do not reach an agreement, the expeditor shall make a decision resolving the dispute as soon as possible. If a party does not comply with an agreement of the parties or a decision of the expeditor, any party may bring a motion with the court to resolve the dispute. The court may consider the agreement of the parties or the decision of the expeditor, but neither is binding on the court.

Subd. 4. **Other agreements.** This section does not preclude the parties from voluntarily agreeing to submit their visitation dispute to a neutral third party.

**History:** 1989 c 248 s 6

## 518.54 DEFINITIONS.

*[For text of subds 1 to 5, see M.S.1988]*

Subd. 6. **Income.** "Income" means any form of periodic payment to an individual including, but not limited to, wages, salaries, payments to an independent contractor, workers' compensation, unemployment compensation, annuity, military and naval retirement, pension and disability payments. Benefits received under sections 256.72 to 256.87 and chapter 256D are not income under this section.

*[For text of subds 7 to 12, see M.S.1988]*

**History:** 1989 c 282 art 2 s 189

## 518.551 MAINTENANCE AND SUPPORT PAYMENTS MADE TO WELFARE AGENCIES.

*[For text of subds 1 and 5, see M.S.1988]*

Subd. 5a. **Order for community services.** If the court finds that the obligor earns \$400 or less per month and does not have the ability to provide support based on the guidelines and factors under subdivision 5, the court may order the obligor to perform community services to fulfill the obligor's support obligation. In ordering community services under this subdivision, the court shall consider whether the obligor has the physical capability of performing community services, and shall order community services that are appropriate for the obligor's abilities.

*[For text of subds 6 to 9, see M.S.1988]*

Subd. 10. **Administrative process for child and medical support orders.** An administrative process is established to obtain, modify, and enforce child and medical support orders and maintenance.

The commissioner of human services may designate counties to participate in the administrative process established by this section. All proceedings for obtaining, modifying, or enforcing child and medical support orders and maintenance and adjudicating uncontested parentage proceedings, required to be conducted in counties designated by the commissioner of human services in which the county human services agency is a party or represents a party to the action must be conducted by an administrative law judge from the office of administrative hearings, except for the following proceedings:

- (1) adjudication of contested parentage;
- (2) motions to set aside a paternity adjudication or declaration of parentage;
- (3) evidentiary hearing on contempt motions; and
- (4) motions to sentence or to revoke the stay of a jail sentence in contempt proceedings.

An administrative law judge may hear a stipulation reached on a contempt motion, but any stipulation that involves a finding of contempt and a jail sentence, whether stayed or imposed, shall require the review and signature of a district judge.

For the purpose of this process, all powers, duties, and responsibilities conferred on judges of the district court to obtain and enforce child and medical support obligations, subject to the limitation set forth herein, are conferred on the administrative law judge conducting the proceedings, including the power to issue orders to show cause and to issue bench warrants for failure to appear.

Before implementing the process in a county, the chief administrative law judge, the commissioner of human services, the director of the county human services agency, the county attorney, and the county court administrator shall jointly establish procedures and the county shall provide hearing facilities for implementing this process in a county.

Nonattorney employees of the public agency responsible for child support in the counties designated by the commissioner, acting at the direction of the county attorney, may prepare, sign, serve, and file complaints and motions for obtaining, modifying, or enforcing child and medical support orders and maintenance and related documents, appear at prehearing conferences, and participate in proceedings before an administrative law judge. This activity shall not be considered to be the unauthorized practice of law.

The hearings shall be conducted under the rules of the office of administrative hearings, Minnesota Rules, parts 1400.7100 to 1400.7500, 1400.7700, and 1400.7800, as adopted by the chief administrative law judge. All other aspects of the case, including, but not limited to, pleadings, discovery, and motions, shall be conducted under the rules of family court, the rules of civil procedure, and chapter 518. The administrative law judge shall make findings of fact, conclusions, and a final decision and issue an order. Orders issued by an administrative law judge are enforceable by the contempt powers of the county and district courts.

The decision and order of the administrative law judge shall be a final agency decision for purposes of sections 14.63 to 14.69.

*[For text of subd 11, see M.S.1988]*

**History:** 1989 c 282 art 2 s 190,191

## **518.552 MAINTENANCE.**

*[For text of subds 1 to 4, see M.S.1988]*

**Subd. 5. Private agreements.** The parties may expressly preclude or limit modification of maintenance through a stipulation, if the court makes specific findings that the stipulation is fair and equitable, is supported by consideration described in the findings, and that full disclosure of each party's financial circumstances has occurred. The stipulation must be made a part of the judgment and decree.

**History:** 1989 c 248 s 7

## **518.58 DIVISION OF MARITAL PROPERTY.**

**Subdivision 1. General.** Upon a dissolution of a marriage, an annulment, or in a proceeding for disposition of property following a dissolution of marriage by a court which lacked personal jurisdiction over the absent spouse or lacked jurisdiction to dispose of the property and which has since acquired jurisdiction, the court shall make a just and equitable division of the marital property of the parties without regard to marital misconduct, after making findings regarding the division of the property. The court shall base its findings on all relevant factors including the length of the marriage, any prior marriage of a party, the age, health, station, occupation, amount and sources of income, vocational skills, employability, estate, liabilities, needs, opportunity for future acquisition of capital assets, and income of each party. The court shall also consider the contribution of each in the acquisition, preservation, depreciation or appreciation in the amount or value of the marital property, as well as the contribution of a spouse as a homemaker. It shall be conclusively presumed that each spouse made

a substantial contribution to the acquisition of income and property while they were living together as husband and wife. The court may also award to either spouse the household goods and furniture of the parties, whether or not acquired during the marriage. The court shall value marital assets for purposes of division between the parties as of the day of the initially scheduled prehearing settlement conference, unless a different date is agreed upon by the parties, or unless the court makes specific findings that another date of valuation is fair and equitable. If there is a substantial change in value of an asset between the date of valuation and the final distribution, the court may adjust the valuation of that asset as necessary to effect an equitable distribution. During the pendency of a marriage dissolution or annulment proceeding, each party owes a fiduciary duty to the other for any profit or loss derived by the party, without consent of the other, from a transaction or from any use by the party of the marital assets.

*[For text of subds 2 to 4, see M.S.1988]*

**History:** 1989 c 248 s 8

### **518.611 INCOME WITHHOLDING.**

*[For text of subds 1 to 3, see M.S.1988]*

**Subd. 4. Effect of order.** Notwithstanding any law to the contrary, the order is binding on the employer, trustee, or other payor of the funds when service under subdivision 2 has been made. Withholding must begin no later than the first pay period that occurs after 14 days following the date of the notice. An employer or other payor of funds in this state is required to withhold income according to court orders for withholding issued by other states or territories. The payor shall withhold from the income payable to the obligor the amount specified in the order and amounts required under subdivision 2, paragraph (b), and section 518.613 and shall remit, within ten days of the date the obligor is paid the remainder of the income, the amounts withheld to the public authority. The payor shall identify on the remittance information the date the obligor is paid the remainder of the income. Employers may combine all amounts withheld from one pay period into one payment to each public authority, but shall separately identify each obligor making payment. Amounts received by the public authority which are in excess of public assistance expended for the party or for a child shall be remitted to the party. An employer shall not discharge, or refuse to hire, or otherwise discipline an employee as a result of a wage or salary withholding authorized by this section. The employer or other payor of funds shall be liable to the obligee for any amounts required to be withheld.

*[For text of subds 5 to 11, see M.S.1988]*

**History:** 1989 c 282 art 2 s 192

### **518.613 AUTOMATIC WITHHOLDING.**

**Subdivision 1. General.** Notwithstanding any provision of section 518.611, subdivision 2 or 3, to the contrary, whenever an obligation for child support or maintenance, enforced by the public authority, is initially determined and ordered or modified by the court in a county in which this section applies, the amount of child support or maintenance ordered by the court must be withheld from the income, regardless of source, of the person obligated to pay the support.

**Subd. 2. Order; collection services.** Every order for child support must include the obligor's social security number and the name and address of the obligor's employer or other payor of funds. Upon entry of the order for support or maintenance, the court shall mail a copy of the court's automatic income withholding order and the provisions of section 518.611 and this section to the obligor's employer or other payor of funds and to the public authority responsible for child support enforcement. An obligee who is not a recipient of public assistance shall apply for the collection services of the public

authority when an order for support is entered unless the requirements of this section have been waived under subdivision 7. No later than January 1, 1990, the supreme court shall develop a standard automatic income withholding form to be used by all Minnesota courts. This form shall be made a part of any order for support or decree by reference.

*[For text of subd 3, see M.S.1988]*

**Subd. 4. Application.** On and after August 1, 1989, this section applies in a county selected under Laws 1987, chapter 403, article 3, section 93, and in a county that chooses to have this section apply by resolution of a majority vote of its county board. On and after November 1, 1990, this section applies to all child support and maintenance obligations that are initially ordered or modified on and after November 1, 1990, and that are being enforced by the public authority.

**Subd. 5.** [Repealed, 1989 c 282 art 2 s 219]

**Subd. 6. Notice of services.** The department of human services shall prepare and make available to the courts a form notice of child support and maintenance collection services available through the public authority responsible for child support enforcement, including automatic income withholding under this section. Promptly upon the filing of a petition for dissolution of marriage or legal separation by parties who have a minor child, the court administrator shall send the form notice to the petitioner and respondent at the addresses given in the petition. The rulemaking provisions of chapter 14 shall not apply to the preparation of the form notice.

**Subd. 7. Waiver.** (a) The court may waive the requirements of this section if the court finds that there is no arrearage in child support or maintenance as of the date of the hearing, that it would not be contrary to the best interests of the child, and: (1) one party demonstrates and the court finds that there is good cause to waive the requirements of this section or to terminate automatic income withholding on an order previously entered under this section; or (2) all parties reach a written agreement that provides for an alternative payment arrangement and the agreement is approved by the court after a finding that the agreement is likely to result in regular and timely payments. If the court waives the requirements of this section:

(1) in all cases where the obligor is at least 30 days in arrears, withholding must be carried out pursuant to section 518.611;

(2) the obligee may at any time and without cause request the court to issue an order for automatic income withholding under this section; and

(3) the obligor may at any time request the public authority to begin withholding pursuant to this section, by serving upon the public authority the request and a copy of the order for child support or maintenance. Upon receipt of the request, the public authority shall serve a copy of the court's order and the provisions of section 518.611 and this section on the obligor's employer or other payor of funds. The public authority shall notify the court that withholding has begun at the request of the obligor pursuant to this clause.

(b) For purposes of this subdivision, "parties" includes the public authority in cases when it is a party pursuant to section 518.551, subdivision 9.

**History:** 1989 c 282 art 2 s 193-197

## **518.64 MODIFICATION OF ORDERS OR DECREES.**

*[For text of subd 1, see M.S.1988]*

**Subd. 2. Modification.** The terms of a decree respecting maintenance or support may be modified upon a showing of one or more of the following: (1) substantially increased or decreased earnings of a party; (2) substantially increased or decreased need of a party; (3) receipt of assistance under sections 256.72 to 256.87; or (4) a change in the cost of living for either party as measured by the federal bureau of statistics, any of which makes the terms unreasonable and unfair. On a motion for modification of

maintenance, the court shall apply, in addition to all other relevant factors, the factors for an award of maintenance under section 518.552 that exist at the time of the motion. On a motion for modification of support, the court shall take into consideration the needs of the children and shall not consider the financial circumstances of each party's spouse, if any. A modification of support or maintenance may be made retroactive only with respect to any period during which the petitioning party has pending a motion for modification but only from the date of service of notice of the motion on the responding party. Except for an award of the right of occupancy of the homestead, provided in section 518.63, all divisions of real and personal property provided by section 518.58 shall be final, and may be revoked or modified only where the court finds the existence of conditions that justify reopening a judgment under the laws of this state, including motions under section 518.145, subdivision 2. The court may impose a lien or charge on the divided property at any time while the property, or subsequently acquired property, is owned by the parties or either of them, for the payment of maintenance or support money, or may sequester the property as is provided by section 518.24.

*[For text of subds 3 to 5, see M.S.1988]*

**History:** 1951 c 551 s 11; 1974 c 107 s 26; 1978 c 772 s 59; 1979 c 259 s 31; 1981 c 360 art 2 s 48,49; 1982 c 424 s 130; 1983 c 283 s 1; 1983 c 308 s 22,23; 1984 c 654 art 5 s 58; 1985 c 266 s 3; 1986 c 406 s 8; 1987 c 403 art 3 s 90; 1988 c 532 s 14; 1988 c 668 s 24