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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2014

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A N A C T

RELATING TO DOMESTIC RELATIONS - DIVORCE AND SEPARATION

Introduced By: Representatives MacBeth, McLaughlin, Dickinson, and Marcello

Date Introduced: February 06, 2014

Referred To: House Judiciary

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1           SECTION 1. Section 15-5-16.2 of the General Laws in Chapter 15-5 entitled "Divorce  
2 and Separation" is hereby amended to read as follows:

3           **15-5-16.2. Child support.** -- (a) In a proceeding for divorce, divorce from bed and board,  
4 a miscellaneous petition without the filing of divorce proceedings, or child support, the court shall  
5 order either or both parents owing a duty of support to a child to pay an amount based upon a  
6 formula and guidelines adopted by an administrative order of the family court. There shall be a  
7 rebuttable presumption that the amount of the guideline is appropriate. If, after calculating  
8 support based upon court established formula and guidelines, the court, in its discretion, and  
9 considering the best interests of the child, finds the order would be inequitable to the child or  
10 either parent, the court shall make written findings of fact, the presumption shall be overcome and  
11 the court shall order either or both parents owing a duty of support to pay an amount reasonable  
12 or necessary for the child's support after considering all relevant factors including, but not limited  
13 to:

14           (1) The financial resources of the child;

15           (2) The financial resources of the custodial parent;

16           (3) The standard of living the child would have enjoyed had the marriage not been  
17 dissolved;

18           (4) The physical and emotional condition of the child and his or her educational needs;

19 and

1 (5) The financial resources and needs of the non-custodial parent.

2 (b) The court may, if in its discretion it deems it necessary or advisable, order child  
3 support and education costs for children attending high school at the time of their eighteenth  
4 (18th) birthday and for ninety (90) days after graduation, but in no case beyond their nineteenth  
5 (19th) birthday, subject to the exceptions set forth in subsection (c) of this section.

6 (c)(1) The court may make appropriate orders of maintenance, support and education of  
7 any child who has attained the age of eighteen (18), but who has not attained the age of twenty-  
8 one (21) and whose legal address is in the home of a parent, and is principally dependent upon  
9 said parent for maintenance.

10 (2) The court may make appropriate orders of maintenance, support and education for  
11 any child who has attained the age of twenty-one (21), but who has not attained the age of  
12 twenty-three (23), if such child's legal address is in the home of a parent, and such child is  
13 principally dependent upon said parent for maintenance due to the enrollment of such child in an  
14 educational program excluding educational costs beyond an undergraduate degree.

15 Notwithstanding the foregoing, the court, in its discretion, may order child support, in  
16 the case of a child with a severe physical or mental impairment still living with or under the care  
17 of a parent, beyond the child's emancipation as defined above. The court shall consider the  
18 following factors when making its determination: (1) the nature and extent of the disability; (2)  
19 the cost of the extraordinary medical expenses; (3) the ability of the child to earn income; (4) the  
20 financial resources of the child; (5) the financial resources of the parents; (6) the inability of the  
21 primary caregiver of the child to sustain gainful employment on a full-time basis due to the care  
22 necessitated by the child. The onset of the disability must have occurred prior to the emancipation  
23 event. If a child support order for a child with a severe physical or mental impairment has been  
24 terminated, suspended or expired, the court shall consider the factors in this paragraph and has the  
25 discretion to order child support for this child prospectively based upon established child support  
26 guidelines. The court may periodically review the case to determine if circumstances warrant the  
27 continuation of child support.

28 ~~(e)~~ (d)(1) The court may, if in its discretion it deems it necessary or advisable, appoint an  
29 attorney or a guardian ad litem to represent the interest of a minor or dependent child with respect  
30 to his or her support, custody, and visitation.

31 (i) In determining whether an appointment should be made, the court shall consider the  
32 extent to which a guardian ad litem may assist in providing information concerning the best  
33 interest of the child; the age of the child; the wishes of the parents as well as their financial  
34 resources; the nature of the proceeding including the level of contentiousness, allegations of child

1 abuse or domestic violence and the risk of harm to the child if a guardian is not appointed; or  
2 conflicts of interest between the child and parents or siblings;

3 (ii) The guardian ad litem shall be appointed from a list of persons properly credentialed  
4 pursuant to administrative orders of the chief judge of the family court;

5 (iii) The court shall enter an order of appointment stating the specific assignment the  
6 optional and mandatory duties of the guardian ad litem, the guardian's access to the child and  
7 confidential information regarding the child, and a provision for payment of the costs and fees of  
8 the guardian ad litem;

9 (iv) Communications made to a guardian, including those made by a child, are not  
10 privileged and may or may not be disclosed to the parties, the court or to professionals providing  
11 services to the child or the family;

12 (v) The guardian ad litem shall meet with the child, conduct an investigation and upon  
13 request of the court shall prepare an oral or written report that contains the procedural background  
14 of the case, identification of all persons interviewed and other sources of information, a statement  
15 of the child's emotional, medical, educational and social service needs, the child's wishes and  
16 other factors relevant to the court's determination regarding the best interests of the child;

17 (vi) Any written report of the guardian ad litem shall be marked as a full exhibit in the  
18 proceedings, subject to cross-examination;

19 (vii) If the guardian ad litem requests confidential health care information and consent is  
20 withheld, he or she shall apply to the court for leave to obtain such information after compliance  
21 with section 5-37.3-6.1;

22 (viii) The guardian ad litem shall be given notice of and should appear at all proceedings  
23 in family court that affect the interests of the child;

24 (ix) A person serving as a guardian ad litem under this section acts as the court's agent  
25 and is entitled to quasi-judicial immunity for acts performed within the scope of the duties of the  
26 guardian ad litem;

27 (x) The chief judge of the family court shall issue, through administrative orders, rules  
28 governing the appointment and performance of guardians ad litem in domestic proceedings.

29 (2) After a decree for support has been entered, the court may from time to time upon the  
30 petition of either party review and alter its decree relative to the amount of support and the  
31 payment of it, and may make any decree relative to it which it might have made in the original  
32 suit. The decree may be made retroactive in the court's discretion only to the date that notice of a  
33 petition to modify was given to the adverse party if the court finds that a substantial change in  
34 circumstances has occurred; provided, that the court shall set forth in its decision the specific

1 findings of fact which show a substantial change in circumstances and upon which findings of  
2 facts the court has decided to make the decree retroactive. The child support order shall continue  
3 in full force and effect, by wage withholding, after the youngest child is emancipated, and shall  
4 be applied towards any arrearage due and owing, as indicated on the child support computer  
5 system. Upon satisfaction of the arrears due and owing the child support order shall be  
6 automatically suspended and wage withholding terminated without the necessity of returning to  
7 family court.

8 ~~(d)~~(e)(1) In a proceeding to enforce a child support order, or a spousal support order for a  
9 custodial parent having custody of a minor child, the court or its magistrate may assign to the  
10 obligee such tangible personal property of the obligor that will be sufficient to satisfy the child or  
11 spousal support arrearage owed. The court or its magistrate, after a hearing, shall establish the  
12 amount of the child or spousal support arrearage, and the nature and value of the tangible  
13 personal property. To effect the assignment, the court or its magistrate may order the obligor to  
14 execute and deliver the documents of title which may be necessary to complete the transfer of  
15 title to the property, and may order the obligor to deliver possession of the property to the  
16 obligee. Whenever the obligor fails to comply with the order assigning the property, the order of  
17 assignment shall be regarded as a judgment vesting title to the property in the obligor as fully and  
18 completely as if the obligor had executed and delivered the documents of title.

19 (2) Any order for child support issued by the family court shall contain a provision  
20 requiring either or both parents owing a duty of support to a child to obtain health insurance  
21 coverage for the child when coverage is available to the parent or parents through their  
22 employment without cost or at a reasonable cost. "Reasonable cost" shall be defined in  
23 accordance with guidelines adopted by administrative order of the family court in conjunction  
24 with the child support guidelines.

25 (3) Any existing child support orders may be modified in accordance with this  
26 subsection unless the court makes specific written findings of fact that take into consideration the  
27 best interests of the child and conclude that a child support order or medical order would be  
28 unjust or inappropriate in a particular case.

29 (4) In addition, the national medical support notice shall be issued with respect to all  
30 orders issued, enforced, or modified on or after October 1, 2002, in accordance with chapter 29 of  
31 title 15. The notice shall inform the employer of provisions in the child support order, for health  
32 care coverage for the child, and contain instructions on how to implement this coverage. In lieu of  
33 the court ordering the non-custodial parent to obtain or maintain health care coverage for the  
34 child, the court may order the non-custodial parent to contribute a weekly cash amount towards

1 the medical premium for health care coverage paid by the state of Rhode Island and/or the  
2 custodial parent. The method to determine a reasonable weekly amount shall be addressed in the  
3 family court administrative order pertaining to the child support guidelines.

4 ~~(e)~~(f) In a proceeding to establish support, the court in its discretion may, after  
5 opportunity for a hearing, issue a temporary order for child support payable into the registry of  
6 the court and to be held pending entry of judgment. In the event of a final adjudication requiring  
7 no payment or payments in an amount less than those payments which have been made pursuant  
8 to a temporary order under this section, the defendant shall be entitled to a refund of all or a  
9 portion of the amounts paid.

10 ~~(f)~~(g) In any proceeding to establish support, or in any case in which an obligor owes  
11 past due support, for a child or children receiving public assistance pursuant to chapter 5.1 of title  
12 40, the court or its magistrate, upon a finding that an able bodied absent parent obligor is  
13 unemployed, underemployed or lacks sufficient income or resources from which to make  
14 payment of support equal to the public assistance payment for the child or children, or is unable  
15 to pay the arrearages in accordance with a payment plan, may order that parent to perform unpaid  
16 community service for at least twenty (20) hours per week through community service  
17 placements arranged and supervised by the department of human services or to participate in any  
18 work activities that the court deems appropriate. The performance of community service shall not  
19 be a basis for retroactive suspension of arrears due and owing.

20 ~~(g)~~(h)(1) In any proceeding to establish support for a minor child whose adjudicated  
21 parent is a minor (minor-parent), the court or its magistrate may order a grandparent of the minor  
22 child to reimburse the department of human services in an amount not to exceed the total amount  
23 of cash assistance benefits paid to or for the minor child pursuant to chapter 5.1 of title 40 until  
24 the minor-parent reaches the age of eighteen (18), less any payment made to the department by  
25 the minor parent.

26 (2) The obligation of reimbursement for the minor child shall be the joint and several  
27 responsibility of the minor parent and the grandparent(s) until the minor parent reaches the age of  
28 eighteen (18); provided, that each joint obligor shall have a right of contribution against each joint  
29 obligor, which right shall be enforceable by an action in the family court.

30 ~~(h)~~(i)(1) All support orders established or modified in the state on or after October 1,  
31 1998, shall be recorded with the Rhode Island family court department of human services child  
32 support computer enforcement system, which maintains the official registry of support orders  
33 entered in accordance with applicable administrative orders issued by the Rhode Island family  
34 court. The support order shall be recorded whether or not services are being provided under the

1 IV-D state plan.

2 (2) The obligee to a paternity or child support proceeding shall be required to file with  
3 the family court, upon the entry of the order, the appropriate form as provided by family court  
4 which includes the full name of the parties, residential and mailing address, telephone number,  
5 drivers license number, social security number and the name, address and telephone number of  
6 the employer. The form shall also include the full order amount and date and amount of  
7 arrearages if any, the name of the child(ren), their date of birth, address and social security  
8 number and any other information as required by administrative order.

9 (3) After this, each party is required to file an amended form whenever any of the  
10 information contained on the original form has been changed in any way, within ten (10) days of  
11 the change. The information shall be entered in the child support enforcement computer system  
12 within five (5) business days of receipt of the amended form.

13 ~~(i)~~ In any subsequent child support enforcement action between the parties, upon  
14 sufficient showing that diligent effort has been made to ascertain the location of such a party, the  
15 court may deem state due process requirements for notice and service of process to be met with  
16 respect to the party, upon service by first class mail or, where appropriate, by service as specified  
17 in the Rhode Island rules of procedure for domestic relations for the Family Court of Rhode  
18 Island, of written notice to the most recent residential or employer address of record.

19 [See section 12-1-15 of the General Laws.]

20 SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION  
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
OF

A N A C T  
RELATING TO DOMESTIC RELATIONS - DIVORCE AND SEPARATION

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1           This act would provide that if a child is between the ages of eighteen (18) and twenty-one  
2 (21) and whose legal address is in the home of a parent and is principally dependent upon that  
3 parent for maintenance then the court may make an order for maintenance support and education  
4 for the child. If the child is between the age of twenty-one (21) and to twenty-three (23) and legal  
5 address is in the home of a parent and dependent on that parent for maintenance due to enrollment  
6 in an undergraduate program then the court may make an order of maintenance support and  
7 education for him or her.

8           This act would take effect upon passage.

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