

House Bill 1198 (AS PASSED HOUSE AND SENATE)

By: Representatives Meadows of the 5th, Houston of the 170th, Smith of the 131st, Hembree of the 67th, Coleman of the 97th, and others

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT

To amend Article 1 of Chapter 7 of Title 19 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to general provisions for parent and child relationships generally, so as to modify provisions relating to grandparent visitation rights; to provide for an opportunity to seek grandparent visitation in cases where the parent is deceased, incapacitated, or incarcerated or otherwise unable to exercise his or her discretion regarding a decision to permit grandparent visitation; to provide for related matters; to provide for an effective date; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

SECTION 1.

Article 1 of Chapter 7 of Title 19 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to general provisions for parent and child relationships generally, is amended by revising Code Section 19-7-3, relating to "grandparent" defined, original actions for visitation rights or intervention, revocation or amendment of visitation rights, appointment of guardian ad litem, mediation, and hearing, as follows:

"19-7-3.

(a) As used in this Code section, the term 'grandparent' means the parent of a parent of a minor child, the parent of a minor child's parent who has died, and the parent of a minor child's parent whose parental rights have been terminated.

(b)(1) Except as otherwise provided in paragraph (2) of this subsection, any grandparent shall have the right to file an original action for visitation rights to a minor child or to intervene in and seek to obtain visitation rights in any action in which any court in this state shall have before it any question concerning the custody of a minor child, a divorce of the parents or a parent of such minor child, a termination of the parental rights of either parent of such minor child, or visitation rights concerning such minor child or whenever there has been an adoption in which the adopted child has been adopted by the child's

blood relative or by a stepparent, notwithstanding the provisions of Code Section 19-8-19.

(2) This subsection shall not authorize an original action where the parents of the minor child are not separated and the child is living with both of the parents.

(c)(1) Upon the filing of an original action or upon intervention in an existing proceeding under subsection (b) of this Code section, the court may grant any grandparent of the child reasonable visitation rights if the court finds the health or welfare of the child would be harmed unless such visitation is granted; and if the best interests of the child would be served by such visitation. In considering whether the health or welfare of the child would be harmed without such visitation, the court shall consider and may find that harm to the child is reasonably likely to result where, prior to the original action or intervention:

(A) The minor child resided with the grandparent for six months or more;

(B) The grandparent provided financial support for the basic needs of the child for at least one year;

(C) There was an established pattern of regular visitation or child care by the grandparent with the child; or

(D) Any other circumstance exists indicating that emotional or physical harm would be reasonably likely to result if such visitation is not granted.

The court shall make specific written findings of fact in support of its rulings. ~~There shall be no presumption in favor of visitation by any grandparent.~~

(2) An original action requesting visitation rights shall not be filed by any grandparent more than once during any two-year period and shall not be filed during any year in which another custody action has been filed concerning the child. After visitation rights have been granted to any grandparent, the legal custodian, guardian of the person, or parent of the child may petition the court for revocation or amendment of such visitation rights, for good cause shown, which the court, in its discretion, may grant or deny; but such a petition shall not be filed more than once in any two-year period.

(3) While a parent's decision regarding grandparent visitation shall be given deference by the court, the parent's decision shall not be conclusive when failure to provide grandparent contact would result in emotional harm to the child. A court may presume that a child who is denied any contact with his or her grandparent or who is not provided some minimal opportunity for contact with his or her grandparent may suffer emotional injury that is harmful to such child's health. Such presumption shall be a rebuttable presumption.

(4) In no case shall the granting of visitation rights to a grandparent interfere with a child's school or regularly scheduled extracurricular activities. Visitation time awarded to a grandparent shall not be less than 24 hours in any one-month period.

(d) Notwithstanding the provisions of subsections (b) and (c) of this Code section, if one of the parents of a minor child dies, is incapacitated, or is incarcerated, the court may award the parent of the deceased, incapacitated, or incarcerated parent of such minor child reasonable visitation to such child during his or her minority if the court in its discretion finds that such visitation would be in the best interests of the child. The custodial parent's judgment as to the best interests of the child regarding visitation shall be given deference by the court but shall not be conclusive.

~~(d)~~(e) If the court finds that the grandparent or grandparents can bear the cost without unreasonable financial hardship, the court, at the sole expense of the petitioning grandparent or grandparents, may:

(1) Appoint a guardian ad litem for the minor child; and

(2) Assign the issue of visitation rights of a grandparent for mediation.

~~(e)~~(f) In the event that the court does not order mediation or upon failure of the parties to reach an agreement through mediation, the court shall fix a time for the hearing of the issue of visitation rights of the grandparent or grandparents.

(g) Whether or not visitation is awarded to a grandparent, the court may direct a custodial parent, by court order, to notify such grandparent of every performance of the minor child to which the public is admitted, including, but not limited to, musical concerts, graduations, recitals, and sporting events or games."

SECTION 2.

This Act shall become effective upon its approval by the Governor or upon its becoming law without such approval.

SECTION 3.

All laws and parts of laws in conflict with this Act are repealed.