

600A.4 Relationship unaltered — release of custody — voluntariness of release.

1. A parent shall not permanently alter the parent-child relationship, except as ordered by a juvenile court or court. However, custody of a minor child may be assumed by a stepparent or a relative of that child within the fourth degree of consanguinity or transferred by an acceptance of a release of custody. A person who assumes custody or an agency which accepts a release of custody under this section becomes, upon assumption or acceptance, the custodian of the minor child.

2. A release of custody:

a. Shall be accepted only by an agency or a person making an independent placement.

b. Shall not be accepted by a person who in any way intends to adopt the child who is the subject of the release.

c. Shall be in writing.

d. Shall contain written acknowledgment of the biological parents that after the birth of the child three hours of counseling have been offered to the biological parents by the agency, the person making an independent placement, an investigator as defined in section 600.2, or other qualified counselor regarding the decision to release custody and the alternatives available to the biological parents. The release of custody shall also contain written acknowledgment of the acceptance or refusal of the counseling. If accepted, the counseling shall be provided after the birth of the child and prior to the signing of a release of custody or the filing of a petition for termination of parental rights as applicable. Counseling shall be provided only by a person who is qualified under rules adopted by the department of human services which shall include a requirement that the person complete a minimum number of hours of training in the area of adoption-related counseling approved by the department. If counseling is accepted, the counselor shall provide an affidavit, which shall be attached to the release of custody, when practicable, certifying that the counselor has provided the biological parent with the requested counseling and documentation that the person is qualified to provide the requested counseling as prescribed by this paragraph. The requirements of this paragraph do not apply to a release of custody which is executed for the purposes of a stepparent adoption.

e. Shall contain a notice to the biological parent that if the biological parent chooses to identify the other biological parent and knowingly and intentionally identifies a person who is not the other biological parent in the written release of custody or in any other document related to the termination of parental rights proceedings, the biological parent who provides the incorrect identifying information is guilty of a simple misdemeanor.

f. Shall be accompanied by a report which includes, to the extent available, the complete family medical and social history of the person to be adopted including any known genetic, metabolic, or familial disorders and the complete medical and developmental history of the person to be adopted, and a social history of the minor child and the minor child's family but which does not disclose the identity of the biological parents of the person to be adopted. The social history may include but is not limited to the minor child's racial, ethnic, and religious background and a general description of the minor child's biological parents and an account of the minor child's prior and existing relationship with any relative, foster parent, or other individual with whom the minor child regularly lives or whom the child regularly visits.

A biological parent may also provide ongoing information to the adoptive parents, as additional medical or social history information becomes known, by providing information to the clerk of court, the department of human services, or the agency which made the placement, and may provide the current address of the biological parent. The clerk of court, the department of human services, or the agency which made the placement shall transmit the information to the adoptive parents if the address of the adoptive parents is known.

A person who furnishes a report required under this paragraph and the court shall not disclose any information upon which the report is based except as otherwise provided in this section and such a person is subject to the penalties provided in section 600.16, as applicable. A person who is the subject of any report may bring a civil action against a person who discloses the information in violation of this section.

Information provided under this paragraph shall not be used as evidence in any civil or criminal proceeding against a person who is the subject of the information.

The department shall prescribe forms designed to obtain the family medical and social history and shall provide the forms at no charge to any agency or person who executes a release of custody of the minor child or who files a petition for termination of parental rights. The existence of this report does not limit a person's ability to petition the court for release of records in accordance with other provisions of law.

g. Shall be signed, not less than seventy-two hours after the birth of the child to be released, by all living parents. The seventy-two-hour minimum time period requirement shall not be waived.

h. Shall be witnessed by two persons familiar with the parent-child relationship.

i. Shall name the person who is accepting the release.

j. Shall be followed, within a reasonable time, by the filing of a petition for termination of parental rights under section 600A.5.

k. Shall state the purpose of the release, shall indicate that if it is not revoked it may be grounds for termination, and shall fully inform the signing parent of the manner in which a revocation of the release may be sought.

3. Notwithstanding the provisions of subsection 2, an agency or a person making an independent placement may assume custody of a minor child upon the signature of the one living parent who has possession of the minor child if the agency or a person making an independent placement immediately petitions the juvenile court designated in section 600A.5 to be appointed custodian and otherwise petitions, either in the same petition or within a reasonable time in a separate petition, for termination of parental rights under section 600A.5. Upon the custody petition, the juvenile court may appoint a guardian as well as a custodian.

4. Either a parent who has signed a release of custody, or a nonsigning parent, may, at any time prior to the entry of an order terminating parental rights, request the juvenile court designated in section 600A.5 to order the revocation of any release of custody previously executed by either parent. If such request is by a signing parent, and is within ninety-six hours of the time such parent signed a release of custody, the juvenile court shall order the release revoked. Otherwise, the juvenile court shall order the release or releases revoked only upon clear and convincing evidence that good cause exists for revocation. Good cause for revocation includes but is not limited to a showing that the release was obtained by fraud, coercion, or misrepresentation of law or fact which was material to its execution. In determining whether good cause exists for revocation, the juvenile court shall give paramount consideration to the best interests of the child including avoidance of a disruption of an existing relationship between a parent and child. The juvenile court shall also give due consideration to the interests of the parents of the child and of any person standing in the place of the parents.

[S13, §3260-c; C24, §3665; C27, 31, 35, §3661-a82, -a83, -a86; C39, §3661.096, 3661.097, 3661.100; C46, 50, 54, 58, 62, 66, 71, 73, 75, §238.25, 238.26, 238.29; C77, 79, 81, §600A.4]

92 Acts, ch 1192, §1, 5; 94 Acts, ch 1174, §14, 15, 22; 99 Acts, ch 138, §6