

## CHAPTER 233

### NEWBORN INFANT CUSTODY RELEASE PROCEDURES (NEWBORN SAFE HAVEN ACT)

Referred to in [§232.2](#), [232.111](#), [232.116](#)

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#### 233.1 Newborn safe haven Act — definitions.

1. [This chapter](#) may be cited as the “*Newborn Safe Haven Act*”.
2. For the purposes of [this chapter](#), unless the context otherwise requires:
  - a. “*First responder*” means an emergency medical care provider, a registered nurse staffing an authorized service program under [section 147A.12](#), a physician assistant staffing an authorized service program under [section 147A.13](#), a fire fighter, or a peace officer as defined in [section 801.4](#).
  - b. “*Institutional health facility*” means a hospital as defined in [section 135B.1](#), including a facility providing medical or health services that is open twenty-four hours per day, seven days per week and is a hospital emergency room or a health care facility as defined in [section 135C.1](#).
  - c. “*Newborn infant*” means a child who is, or who appears to be, thirty days of age or younger.  
[2001 Acts, ch 67, §1, 13; 2002 Acts, ch 1119, §33; 2018 Acts, ch 1050, §1, 2](#)

#### 233.2 Newborn infant custody release procedures.

1. a. A parent of a newborn infant may voluntarily release custody of the newborn infant by relinquishing physical custody of the newborn infant, without expressing an intent to again assume physical custody, at an institutional health facility or by authorizing another person to relinquish physical custody on the parent’s behalf. If physical custody of the newborn infant is not relinquished directly to an individual on duty at the institutional health facility, the parent may take other actions to be reasonably sure that an individual on duty is aware that the newborn infant has been left at the institutional health facility. The actions may include but are not limited to making telephone contact with the institutional health facility or a 911 service.
  - b. In lieu of the procedure described in paragraph “a”, a parent of a newborn infant may make telephone contact with a 911 service and relinquish physical custody of the newborn infant, without expressing an intent to again assume physical custody, to a first responder who responds to the 911 telephone call.
  - c. For the purposes of [this chapter](#) and for any judicial proceedings associated with the newborn infant, a rebuttable presumption arises that the person who relinquishes physical custody at an institutional health facility or to a first responder in accordance with [this section](#) is the newborn infant’s parent or has relinquished physical custody with the parent’s authorization.
2. a. Unless the parent or other person relinquishing physical custody of a newborn infant clearly expresses an intent to return to again assume physical custody of the newborn infant, an individual on duty at the facility at which physical custody of the newborn infant was relinquished, or a first responder to whom physical custody of the newborn infant was relinquished, pursuant to [subsection 1](#) shall take physical custody of the newborn infant. The individual on duty or first responder may request the parent or other person to provide the name of the parent or parents and information on the medical history of the newborn infant and the newborn infant’s parent or parents. However, the parent or other person is not required to provide the names or medical history information to comply with [this section](#). The individual on duty or first responder may perform reasonable acts necessary to protect the physical health or safety of the newborn infant. The individual on duty and

the institutional health facility in which the individual was on duty and the first responder are immune from criminal or civil liability for any acts or omissions made in good faith to comply with [this section](#).

b. If the physical custody of a newborn infant is relinquished to a first responder, the first responder shall transport the newborn infant to the nearest institutional health facility. The first responder shall provide any parental identification or medical history information to the institutional health facility.

c. If the physical custody of the newborn infant is relinquished at an institutional health facility, the state shall reimburse the institutional health facility for the institutional health facility's actual expenses in providing care to the newborn infant and in performing acts necessary to protect the physical health or safety of the newborn infant. The reimbursement shall be paid from moneys appropriated for this purpose to the department of human services.

d. If the name of the parent is unknown to the institutional health facility, the individual on duty or other person designated by the institutional health facility at which physical custody of the newborn infant was relinquished shall submit the certificate of birth report as required pursuant to [section 144.14](#). If the name of the parent is disclosed to the institutional health facility, the facility shall submit the certificate of birth report as required pursuant to [section 144.13](#). The department of public health shall not file the certificate of birth with the county of birth and shall otherwise maintain the confidentiality of the birth certificate in accordance with [section 144.43](#).

3. As soon as possible after the individual on duty or first responder assumes physical custody of a newborn infant released under [subsection 1](#), the individual or first responder shall notify the department of human services and the department shall take the actions necessary to assume the care, control, and custody of the newborn infant. The department shall immediately notify the juvenile court and the county attorney of the department's action and the circumstances surrounding the action and request an ex parte order from the juvenile court ordering, in accordance with the requirements of [section 232.78](#), the department to take custody of the newborn infant. Upon receiving the order, the department shall take custody of the newborn infant. Within twenty-four hours of taking custody of the newborn infant, the department shall notify the juvenile court and the county attorney in writing of the department's action and the circumstances surrounding the action.

4. a. Upon being notified in writing by the department under [subsection 3](#), the county attorney shall file a petition alleging the newborn infant to be a child in need of assistance in accordance with [section 232.87](#) and a petition for termination of parental rights with respect to the newborn infant in accordance with [section 232.111](#), [subsection 2](#), paragraph "a". A hearing on a child in need of assistance petition filed pursuant to [this subsection](#) shall be held at the earliest practicable time. A hearing on a termination of parental rights petition filed pursuant to [this subsection](#) shall be held no later than thirty days after the day the physical custody of the newborn child was relinquished in accordance with [subsection 1](#) unless the juvenile court continues the hearing beyond the thirty days for good cause shown.

b. Notice of a petition filed pursuant to [this subsection](#) shall be provided to any known parent and others in accordance with the provisions of [chapter 232](#) and shall be served upon any putative father registered with the state registrar of vital statistics pursuant to [section 144.12A](#). In addition, prior to holding a termination of parental rights hearing with respect to the newborn infant, notice by publication shall be provided as described in [section 600A.6](#), [subsection 5](#).

5. Reasonable efforts, as defined in [section 232.102](#), that are made in regard to the newborn infant shall be limited to the efforts made in a timely manner to finalize a permanency plan for the newborn infant.

6. An individual on duty at an institutional health facility or first responder who assumes custody of a newborn infant upon the release of the newborn infant under [subsection 1](#) shall be provided notice of any hearing held concerning the newborn infant at the same time notice is provided to other parties to the hearing and the individual or first responder may provide testimony at the hearing.

[2001 Acts, ch 67, §2, 13; 2005 Acts, ch 89, §34; 2018 Acts, ch 1050, §3; 2019 Acts, ch 59, §71](#)  
Referred to in [§233.3, 233.4, 233.6, 726.3, 726.6](#)

### 233.3 Immunity.

Any person authorized by the parent to assist with release of custody in accordance with [section 233.2](#) by relinquishing physical custody of the newborn infant or to otherwise act on the parent's behalf is immune from criminal prosecution for abandonment or neglect of the newborn infant under [section 726.3](#) or [726.6](#) and civil liability for any reasonable acts or omissions made in good faith in assisting with the release.

[2001 Acts, ch 67, §3, 13](#)

### 233.4 Rights of parents.

Either parent of a newborn infant whose custody was released in accordance with [section 233.2](#) may intervene in the child in need of assistance or termination of parental rights proceedings held regarding the newborn infant and request that the juvenile court grant custody of the newborn infant to the parent. The requester must show by clear and convincing evidence that the requester is the parent of the newborn infant. If the court determines that the requester is the parent of the newborn infant and that granting custody of the newborn infant to the parent is in the newborn infant's best interest, the court shall issue an order granting custody of the newborn infant to the parent. In addition to such order, the court may order services for the newborn infant and the parent as are in the best interest of the newborn infant.

[2001 Acts, ch 67, §4, 13](#)

Referred to in [§233.6](#)

### 233.5 Confidentiality protections.

1. *a.* In addition to any other privacy protection established in law, a record that is developed, acquired, or held in connection with an individual's good faith effort to voluntarily release a newborn infant in accordance with [this chapter](#) and any identifying information concerning the individual shall be kept confidential. Such record shall not be inspected or the contents disclosed except as provided in [this section](#).

*b.* Any transcripts or recording of a 911 service telephone call that is made for the purpose of an individual's good faith effort to voluntarily release custody of a newborn infant in accordance with [this chapter](#) and any identifying information concerning the individual shall be kept confidential. Such transcripts or recording of a 911 service telephone call shall not be inspected or the contents disclosed except as provided in this section.

2. A record described in [subsection 1](#) may be inspected and the contents disclosed without court order to the following:

- a.* The court and professional court staff, including juvenile court officers.
- b.* The newborn infant and the newborn infant's counsel.
- c.* The newborn infant's parent, guardian, custodian, and those persons' counsel.
- d.* The newborn infant's court appointed special advocate and guardian ad litem.
- e.* The county attorney and the county attorney's assistants.
- f.* An agency, association, facility, or institution which has custody of the newborn infant, or is legally responsible for the care, treatment, or supervision of the newborn infant.
- g.* The newborn infant's foster parent or an individual providing preadoptive care to the newborn infant.

3. Pursuant to court order a record described in [subsection 1](#) may be inspected by and the contents may be disclosed to any of the following:

*a.* A person conducting bona fide research for research purposes under whatever conditions the court may deem proper, provided that no personal identifying data shall be disclosed to such a person.

*b.* Persons who have a direct interest in a proceeding or in the work of the court.

4. Any person who knowingly discloses, receives, or makes use or permits the use of information derived directly or indirectly from such a record or discloses identifying information concerning such individual, except as provided by [this section](#), commits a serious misdemeanor.

[2001 Acts, ch 67, §5, 13; 2018 Acts, ch 1050, §4](#)

**233.6 Educational and public information.**

The department of human services, in consultation with the Iowa department of public health and the department of justice, shall develop and distribute the following:

1. An information card or other publication for distribution by an institutional health facility or a first responder to a parent who releases custody of a newborn infant in accordance with [this chapter](#). The publication shall inform the parent of a parent's rights under [section 233.4](#), explain the request for medical history information under [section 233.2, subsection 2](#), and provide other information deemed pertinent by the departments.

2. Educational materials, public information announcements, and other resources to develop awareness of the availability of the newborn safe haven Act among adolescents, young parents, and others who might avail themselves of [this chapter](#).

3. Signage that may be used to identify the institutional health facilities at which physical custody of a newborn infant may be relinquished in accordance with [this chapter](#).

[2001 Acts, ch 67, §6, 13; 2002 Acts, ch 1119, §34; 2019 Acts, ch 59, §72](#)