

Relocation Issues

Child custody cases can be difficult to navigate, especially when there are extenuating circumstances, like relocation. The Metropolitan Washington area has three “state” lines, multiple county jurisdictions and a highly mobile population that routinely migrates to and from the region from all over the country and the world. Oftentimes, to facilitate contested child custody cases, the court will appoint professionals or investigators whose findings and opinions can significantly impact these cases. These findings and recommendations, once approved by the court, can be very difficult to reverse or change. Our team has experience representing clients in contested child custody matters and working with court-appointed professionals to ensure the best possible outcome for our clients and their children.

When a custodial parent relocates with a child, it can potentially wreak havoc on an already challenging child custody situation – often forcing a child to have a long-distance relationship with their own parent.

Absent an agreement between the parties, a relocation dispute may arise if the noncustodial parent objects to the intended move based on its potential effect on custody and visitation. As such, courts are often left to decide whether child custody relocation is contrary or in the best interests of the child, and may otherwise require the custodial parent to remain in the state.

The laws vary greatly among jurisdictions concerning child custody relocation. State laws often spell out requirements for relocating with a child, including rules concerning notice, consent and presumptions.

Many states allow child custody relocation provided there is an agreement in place that contains an express consent to relocate and a proposed visitation schedule. This typically takes place during the original child custody proceedings and is usually contained within a clause in the child custody plan.

Some states require a custodial parent to give notice, usually written, of an intended move to the noncustodial parent within a certain time period specified in the statute. For example, 30, 60 or 90 days of notice could be required before the intended move. In addition to a notice requirement, some states require consent of the noncustodial parent to allow the move or to object by filing a motion seeking to prevent relocation.

Some states determine whether to allow a child custody relocation based on distance. For example, if the new location is within a certain distance, even if within the same state, a court may factor that in its determination. Other states consider any move out of the state a significant factor, even if it's barely across state lines, and may prevent a move altogether.

Some states require detail, such as a statement describing a "good faith" reason for the move, especially if moving the child would disrupt the child's school, emotional and social stability. Good faith reasons may include:

- Better cost of living
- Wanting to be closer to one's family to help with child care responsibilities

- New job
- Continuing one's education

Conversely, a court may object to a move based on "bad faith" reasons, such as wanting to move far away from an ex-spouse in revenge or retaliation.

Some states may also consider the noncustodial parents' reasons for objecting to child custody relocation. For example, if an objecting parent is one who did not regularly exercise his or her visitation rights or who was otherwise an "absent parent," a court may find in the custodial parent's favor and allow the move.

Generally, the relocating parent is required to make a proposed visitation schedule, including the times and places for visitation with the noncustodial parent in the new location. Often this includes extended access times during major holidays, spring breaks and summer months.

In addition, because child custody relocation may invoke a substantial change in circumstances, the parties may also need to seek a court modification of custody or visitation order. In certain circumstances, such as joint custody situations, a court may need to reassess child custody between the parties altogether and suggest the non-relocating parent take physical custody of the child to maintain as much stability as possible.

In terms of increased travel costs, some states require a 50-50 split in increased fees, while other states may require the party who is moving to incur most of the transportation costs related to visitation.

Our team successfully supports clients with relocation issues in Maryland, the District of Columbia and Virginia or proposed relocations all across the country.

To consult with a member of our Family Law team to discuss an issue related to Relocation, [contact us](#).

Maryland

When a parent wishes to relocate with a child, in Maryland, a court may require the moving parent to provide notice to the other parent, the court or both within 90 days of the proposed relocation. Oftentimes, the other parent will object to the relocation – in which case they must file a petition with the court within 20 days of the notice or relocation.

At the hearing, the judge must determine whether there is a "material change of circumstances." If there is, the main issue before the judge will then be whether the proposed move is in the child's best interest.

To consult with a member of our Family Law Team about a Relocation issue in Maryland, [contact us](#).