

Committee on Children, Families, and Elder Affairs

CS/CS/SB 124 — Custody of Minor Children by Extended Family

by Judiciary Committee; Children, Families, and Elder Affairs Committee; and Senator Bean

The bill authorizes a court to include in its order granting “temporary” or “concurrent” custody to a child’s extended family member any provision requested by the petitioner which is in the best interest of the child. As under current law, an award of custody of a child for an indefinite period is considered “temporary” if the award excludes the parents, but “concurrent” if custody is shared with the parents.

The bill expands the definition of “extended family member” to include “fictive kin”—nonrelatives who have a familial relationship to the child—thus allowing them to petition for concurrent or temporary custody. The bill requires the petition to include “[a]ny other provisions that are related to the best interests of the child.” The bill also authorizes the court to include these provisions, as well as a transition plan, in its order granting temporary or concurrent custody.

Under the bill, as under current law, a court may order concurrent custody only if the parents do not object, and the court may order temporary custody only if the parents do not object or are unfit. Additionally, under current law a court *must* terminate a concurrent custody order if a parent objects to the order, and the court *must* terminate a temporary custody order if the parent becomes a fit parent. However, the bill authorizes a court to maintain a concurrent custody order after a parent objects, or to maintain a temporary custody order after the parents become fit, under certain circumstances. Particularly, a court may maintain these orders beyond objection or fitness to ensure compliance with a transition plan or other provision of the order which is related to the best interest of the child.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2020.

Vote: Senate 34-0; House 115-1