

Senate Bill 245

By: Senators Hodges of the 3rd, Kennedy of the 18th, Kirkpatrick of the 32nd, Albers of the 56th, Hickman of the 4th and others

AS PASSED

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT

1 To amend Code Section 19-7-3 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to actions
2 by grandparents or other family members for visitation rights or intervention, revocation or
3 amendment of visitation rights, appointment of guardian ad litem, mediation, hearing, and
4 notification to family members of child's participation in events, so as to provide for the
5 revocation or amendment of grandparent visitation rights in cases where the parent of a
6 minor child is deceased, incapacitated, or incarcerated; to provide for related matters; to
7 repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

8 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

9 **SECTION 1.**

10 Code Section 19-7-3 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to actions by
11 grandparents or other family members for visitation rights or intervention, revocation or
12 amendment of visitation rights, appointment of guardian ad litem, mediation, hearing, and
13 notification to family members of child's participation in events, is amended by revising
14 subsections (c) and (d) as follows:

15 "(c)(1) Upon the filing of an original action or upon intervention in an existing
16 proceeding under subsection (b) of this Code section, the court may grant any family

17 member of the child reasonable visitation rights if the court finds by clear and convincing
18 evidence that the health or welfare of the child would be harmed unless such visitation
19 is granted and if the best interests of the child would be served by such visitation. The
20 mere absence of an opportunity for a child to develop a relationship with a family
21 member shall not be considered as harming the health or welfare of the child when there
22 is no substantial preexisting relationship between the child and such family member. In
23 considering whether the health or welfare of the child would be harmed without such
24 visitation, the court shall consider and may find that harm to the child is reasonably likely
25 to result when, prior to the original action or intervention:

26 (A) The minor child resided with the family member for six months or more;

27 (B) The family member provided financial support for the basic needs of the child for
28 at least one year;

29 (C) There was an established pattern of regular visitation with the child by the family
30 member or child care provided by the family member ~~with~~ for the child; or

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

33 The court shall make specific written findings of fact in support of its rulings.

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

42 (3) While a parent's decision regarding family member visitation shall be given
43 deference by the court, the parent's decision shall not be conclusive when failure to

44 provide family member contact would result in emotional harm to the child. A court may
45 presume that a child who is denied any contact with his or her family member or who is
46 not provided some minimal opportunity for contact with his or her family member when
47 there is a preexisting relationship between the child and such family member may suffer
48 emotional injury that is harmful to such child's health. Such presumption shall be a
49 rebuttable presumption.

50 (4) In no case shall the granting of visitation rights to a family member interfere with a
51 child's school or regularly scheduled extracurricular activities.

52 (5) Visitation time awarded to a family member shall not be less than 24 hours in any
53 one-month period; provided, however, that when more than one individual seeks
54 visitation under this Code section, the court shall determine the amount of time to award
55 to each petitioner which shall not be less than 24 hours in any one-month period in the
56 aggregate.

57 (d)(1) Notwithstanding the provisions of subsections (b) and (c) of this Code section, if
58 one of the parents of a minor child dies, is incapacitated, or is incarcerated, the court may
59 award the parent of the deceased, incapacitated, or incarcerated parent of such minor
60 child reasonable visitation to such child during his or her minority if the court finds by
61 clear and convincing evidence that the health or welfare of the child would be harmed
62 unless such visitation is granted and if the best interests of the child would be served by
63 such visitation. After such visitation rights have been granted to any parent of the
64 deceased, incapacitated, or incarcerated parent of the minor child, such parent may
65 petition the court for revocation or amendment of such visitation rights for good cause
66 shown, which the court, in its discretion, may grant or deny; provided, however, that such
67 a petition shall not be filed more than once during any two-year period. The mere
68 absence of an opportunity for a child to develop a relationship with a grandparent shall
69 not be considered as harming the health or welfare of the child when there is no
70 substantial preexisting relationship between the child and such grandparent. The

71 custodial parent's judgment as to the best interests of the child regarding visitation shall
72 be given deference by the court but shall not be conclusive. In considering whether the
73 health or welfare of the child would be harmed without such visitation, the court shall
74 consider and may find that harm to the child is reasonably likely to result when, prior to
75 the death, incapacitation, or incarceration of the child's parent:

- 76 (A) The minor child resided with the grandparent for six months or more;
77 (B) The grandparent provided financial support for the basic needs of the child for at
78 least one year;
79 (C) There was an established pattern of regular visitation or child care by the
80 grandparent with the child; or
81 (D) Any other circumstance exists indicating that emotional or physical harm would
82 be reasonably likely to result if such visitation is not granted.

83 The court shall make specific written findings of fact in support of its rulings.

84 (2) While a custodial parent's decision regarding grandparent visitation shall be given
85 deference by the court, the parent's decision shall not be conclusive when failure to
86 provide grandparent contact would result in emotional harm to the child. A court may
87 presume that a child who is denied any contact with his or her grandparent or who is not
88 provided some minimal opportunity for contact with his or her grandparent when there
89 is a preexisting relationship between the child and such grandparent may suffer emotional
90 injury that is harmful to such child's health. Such presumption shall be a rebuttable
91 presumption."

92 **SECTION 2.**

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