

STATE OF NEW YORK

1488

2023-2024 Regular Sessions

IN ASSEMBLY

January 17, 2023

Introduced by M. of A. WALLACE -- read once and referred to the Committee on Judiciary

AN ACT to amend the family court act, in relation to establishing procedures for the termination of parental rights upon the application of a parent or guardian

The People of the State of New York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:

Section 1. The family court act is amended by adding a new article 6-A to read as follows:

ARTICLE 6-A

PERMANENT TERMINATION OF PARENTAL RIGHTS UPON APPLICATION OF A PARENT OR GUARDIAN

Section 675. Purpose of article.

676. Jurisdiction.

677. Definitions.

678. Originating proceeding for the termination of parental rights with respect to a permanently neglected child.

679. Issuance of summons.

680. Service of summons.

681. Procedural matters.

682. Nondisclosure of information in exceptional circumstances.

683. Evidence.

684. Hearings.

685. Determination.

686. Adjournments.

687. Disposition on adjudication of permanent neglect.

688. Order dismissing petition.

689. Suspended judgment.

690. Termination of parental rights; further orders.

691. Issuance of warrant; certificate of warrant.

§ 675. Purpose of article. The purpose of this article is to provide the procedures for proceedings initiated in family court by a parent or guardian for the termination of the rights of a respondent-parent upon

EXPLANATION--Matter in italics (underscored) is new; matter in brackets [-] is old law to be omitted.

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1 the ground that the respondent-parent has permanently neglected the
2 child.

3 § 676. Jurisdiction. The family court shall have exclusive, original
4 jurisdiction over any proceeding brought upon grounds specified in this
5 article.

6 § 677. Definitions. As used in this article:

7 (a) "permanently neglected child" shall mean a child whose respon-
8 dent-parent or custodian has failed for a period of either at least one
9 year substantially and continuously, or repeatedly, to maintain contact
10 with or plan for the future of the child, although physically and finan-
11 cially able to do so;

12 (b) "petitioner" or "petitioner-parent" means the parent or guardian
13 commencing the action to terminate the parental rights of the respon-
14 dent-parent;

15 (c) "respondent-parent" means the parent whose parental rights are
16 subject to termination;

17 (d) "fact-finding hearing" means a hearing to determine whether the
18 allegations required by paragraphs one, two and three of subdivision (a)
19 of section six hundred seventy-eight of this article are supported by
20 clear and convincing proof; and

21 (e) "dispositional hearing" means a hearing to determine what order of
22 disposition should be made in accordance with the best interests of the
23 child.

24 § 678. Originating proceeding for the termination of parental rights
25 with respect to a permanently neglected child. (a) A proceeding for the
26 termination of parental rights with respect to a child on the ground of
27 permanent neglect is originated by a petition and notice served upon the
28 respondent-parent or his or her attorney, alleging:

29 1. the child is a person under eighteen years of age;

30 2. the child is in the care of one of his or her parents or of a guar-
31 dian;

32 3. the child's respondent-parent has failed to maintain contact with
33 or plan for the future of the child, although physically and financially
34 able to do so, for a period of at least one year; and

35 4. the best interests of the child require that the parental rights of
36 the respondent-parent be terminated.

37 (b) Such notice shall inform the respondent-parent that the proceeding
38 may result in an order terminating his or her parental rights with
39 respect to the child without the consent of or notice to the respon-
40 dent-parent. Such notice also shall inform the respondent-parent of his
41 or her right to the assistance of counsel, including any right they may
42 have to have counsel assigned by the court in any case where they are
43 financially unable to obtain counsel. The petition shall set forth the
44 names and last known addresses of the respondent-parent.

45 § 679. Issuance of summons. On the filing of a petition under this
46 article, the court may cause a copy of the petition and a summons to be
47 issued, requiring the respondent-parent to show cause why the court
48 should not enter an order committing the guardianship and custody of the
49 child to the petitioner-parent for the reason that the child is perma-
50 nently neglected by the respondent-parent.

51 § 680. Service of summons. (a) Service of a summons and petition under
52 this article shall be made by delivery of a true copy thereof to the
53 person summoned at least twenty days before the time stated therein for
54 appearance. If so requested by the respondent-parent, the court may
55 extend the time for appearance and answer.

1 (b) If after reasonable effort, personal service is not made, such
2 substituted service or service by publication as may be ordered by the
3 judge shall be sufficient.

4 (c) Personal service within or without the state or in a foreign coun-
5 try shall be made in accordance with the provisions of section three
6 hundred seven of the surrogate's court procedure act, as the same may be
7 amended from time to time, with respect to service of a citation.

8 (d) Service of the summons and other process with a notice as speci-
9 fied herein by publication shall be made in accordance with the
10 provisions of rule three hundred sixteen of the civil practice law and
11 rules, provided, however, that a single publication of the summons or
12 other process with a notice as specified herein in only one newspaper
13 designated in the order shall be sufficient. In no event shall the whole
14 petition be published. The petition shall be delivered to the person
15 summoned at the first court appearance pursuant to section one hundred
16 fifty-four-a of this act. The notice to be published with the summons or
17 other process shall state:

- 18 1. the date, time, place and purpose of the proceeding;
- 19 2. that upon failure of the person summoned to appear, all of his or
20 her parental rights with respect to the child may be terminated; and
- 21 3. that his or her failure to appear shall constitute a denial of his
22 or her interest in the child, which denial may result, without further
23 notice, in the termination of his or her parental rights with respect to
24 the child.

25 § 681. Procedural matters. (a) The provisions of articles one, two and
26 eleven of this act shall apply to the extent that they do not conflict
27 with the specific provisions of this article. In any proceeding under
28 this section, the provisions and limitations of article thirty-one of
29 the civil practice law and rules shall apply to the extent that they do
30 not conflict with the specific provisions of this article. The court
31 shall set a schedule for discovery to avoid unnecessary delay.

32 (b) In any proceeding brought pursuant to the provisions of this arti-
33 cle, neither the privilege attaching to confidential communications
34 between husband and wife, as set forth in section forty-five hundred two
35 of the civil practice law and rules, nor the physician-patient and
36 related privileges, as set forth in section forty-five hundred four of
37 the civil practice law and rules, nor the psychologist-client privilege,
38 as set forth in section forty-five hundred seven of the civil practice
39 law and rules, nor the social worker-client privilege, as set forth in
40 section forty-five hundred eight of the civil practice law and rules,
41 shall be a ground for excluding evidence which otherwise would be admis-
42 sible.

43 § 682. Nondisclosure of information in exceptional circumstances.
44 Upon a finding, which may be made ex parte, that the health, safety, or
45 liberty of the petitioner-parent or the child would be unreasonably put
46 at risk by the disclosure of identifying information, or if an existing
47 order so provides, the court shall order that the address of the child
48 or petitioner or other identifying information not be disclosed in a
49 pleading or other document filed in a proceeding under this article. In
50 determining any motion for a protective order, the court shall consider
51 the need of the respondent-parent for the discovery to assist in the
52 preparation of the case and any potential harm to the child from the
53 discovery.

54 § 683. Evidence. Only competent, material and relevant evidence may be
55 admitted in a fact-finding hearing; only material and relevant evidence
56 may be admitted in a dispositional hearing. Evidence of parental contact

1 or of failure to maintain contact with a child subsequent to the date of
2 the filing of a petition under this part shall be inadmissible in the
3 fact-finding hearing. Such evidence may be admitted in the dispositional
4 hearing but shall not, of itself, be sufficient as a matter of law to
5 preclude or require an order terminating the respondent-parent's
6 parental rights with respect to the child.

7 § 684. Hearings. (a) Upon completion of the fact-finding hearing, the
8 dispositional hearing may commence immediately after the required find-
9 ings are made; provided, however, that if all parties consent the court
10 may, upon motion of any party or upon its own motion, dispense with the
11 dispositional hearing and make an order of disposition on the basis of
12 competent evidence admitted at the fact-finding hearing.

13 (b) Reports prepared by the probation service or a duly authorized
14 agency for use by the court prior to the making of an order of disposi-
15 tion shall be deemed confidential information furnished to the court
16 which the court in a proper case may, in its discretion, withhold from
17 or disclose in whole or in part to the petitioner's attorney, counsel,
18 party in interest, or other appropriate person. Such reports may not be
19 furnished to the court prior to the completion of a fact-finding hear-
20 ing, but may be used in a dispositional hearing or in the making of an
21 order of disposition without a dispositional hearing pursuant to subdi-
22 vision (a) of this section.

23 § 685. Determination. (a) A determination of whether a respondent-par-
24 ent has failed for a period of either at least one year substantially
25 and continuously, or repeatedly, to maintain contact with or plan for
26 the future of the child, although physically and financially able to do
27 so shall be based on evidence, which may include the following:

28 1. a respondent-parent's expressions or acts manifesting concern for
29 the child, such as letters, telephone calls and other forms of communi-
30 cation with the child;

31 2. the payment by the respondent-parent toward the support of the
32 child of a fair and reasonable sum, according to the respondent-parent's
33 means;

34 3. either: (i) the respondent-parent's visiting the child at least
35 monthly when physically and financially able to do so and not prevented
36 from doing so by the person having lawful custody of the child; or (ii)
37 the respondent-parent's regular communication with the child or with the
38 person having the care or custody of the child, when physically and
39 financially unable to visit the child or prevented from doing so by the
40 person having lawful custody of the child;

41 4. efforts by the respondent-parent to communicate and work with the
42 petitioner-parent, the court and the respondent-parent's attorney or
43 other individuals providing services to the respondent-parent, including
44 correctional, mental health and substance abuse treatment program
45 personnel for the purpose of complying with a service plan or court-ord-
46 ered plan and repairing, maintaining or building the parent-child
47 relationship;

48 5. whether the respondent-parent openly lived with the child and/or
49 the petitioner parent for a continuous period of six months within the
50 one year period immediately preceding the filing of the petition and who
51 during such period openly held himself or herself out to be the parent
52 of such child;

53 6. in the case of a child under the age of six months of age at the
54 time of the filing of the petition, whether the respondent-parent father
55 paid a fair and reasonable sum, in accordance with his means, for the

1 medical, hospital and nursing expenses incurred in connection with the
2 petitioner-parent mother's pregnancy and/or with the birth of the child;
3 7. whether the respondent-parent surrendered or attempted to surrender
4 the child to an authorized agency under the provisions of section three
5 hundred eighty-three-c or three hundred eighty-four of the social
6 services law, or whether a guardian has been appointed for the child
7 under the provisions of section three hundred eighty-four-b of the
8 social services law; or

9 8. whether the respondent-parent has maintained a meaningful role in
10 his or her child's life in any form; and

11 9. whether the involvement or continued involvement of the respon-
12 dent-parent in the child's life is in the child's best interest.

13 (b) Notwithstanding the provisions of subdivision (a) of this section,
14 the court shall terminate the parental rights of a respondent-parent who
15 has executed an instrument, which shall be irrevocable, denying the
16 paternity of the child, such instrument having been executed after
17 conception and acknowledged or proved in the manner required to permit
18 the recording of a deed.

19 (c) 1. The subjective intent of the respondent-parent, whether
20 expressed or otherwise, unsupported by evidence of acts specified in
21 subdivision (a) of this section manifesting such intent, shall not
22 preclude a determination that the respondent-parent failed for a period
23 of either at least one year substantially and continuously, or repeated-
24 ly, to maintain contact with or plan for the future of the child,
25 although physically and financially able. In making such a determi-
26 nation, the court shall not require a showing of diligent efforts by any
27 person or agency to encourage the respondent-parent to perform the acts
28 specified in subdivision (a) of this section.

29 2. Evidence of insubstantial or infrequent contacts by a respondent-
30 parent with his or her child shall not, of itself, be sufficient as a
31 matter of law to preclude a determination that such child is a perma-
32 nently neglected child. A visit or communication by a respondent-parent
33 with the child which is of such character as to overtly demonstrate a
34 lack of affectionate and concerned parenthood shall not be deemed a
35 substantial contact.

36 3. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, the ability to visit
37 and communicate with a child or with the person having custody of the
38 child shall be presumed.

39 (d) 1. The court shall consider the special circumstances of a respon-
40 dent-parent serving in the armed forces, of an incarcerated respondent-
41 parent, of a mentally ill or mentally retarded respondent-parent and of
42 a respondent-parent participating in a residential substance abuse
43 treatment program, when determining whether a child is a "permanently
44 neglected child" as defined in this article. In such cases, the court
45 also shall consider the particular constraints, including but not limit-
46 ed to, limitations placed on family contact and the unavailability of
47 social or rehabilitative services to aid in the development of a mean-
48 ingful relationship between the respondent-parent and his or her child,
49 that may impact the respondent-parent's ability to substantially and
50 continuously or repeatedly maintain contact with his or her child and to
51 plan for the future of his or her child.

52 2. For the purposes of this subdivision:

53 (i) a respondent-parent shall not be deemed unable to maintain contact
54 with or plan for the future of the child by reason of such parent's use
55 of drugs or alcohol, except while the parent is actually hospitalized or
56 institutionalized therefor; and

1 (ii) the time during which a respondent-parent is actually hospital-
2 ized or institutionalized, for mental or physical illness or due to
3 substance abuse, shall not interrupt, but shall not be part of, a period
4 of failure to maintain contact with or plan for the future of a child.

5 3. The determination as to whether a parent is mentally ill or mental-
6 ly retarded shall be made in accordance with the criteria and procedures
7 set forth in subdivision six of section three hundred eighty-four-b of
8 the social services law. Any provisions of this article which explicit-
9 ly or implicitly apply to, or reference, persons who are, or who are
10 alleged to be, mentally retarded shall be deemed to apply to, or to be a
11 reference to, persons who are, or who are alleged to be, developmentally
12 disabled.

13 (e) As used in this article, "to plan for the future of the child"
14 shall mean to take such steps as may be necessary to provide an
15 adequate, stable home and parental care for the child within a period of
16 time which is reasonable under the financial circumstances available to
17 the parent. The plan must be realistic and feasible, and good faith
18 effort shall not, of itself, be determinative. In determining whether a
19 respondent-parent has planned for the future of the child, the court may
20 consider the failure of the parent to utilize medical, psychiatric,
21 psychological and other social and rehabilitative services and material
22 resources made available to such parent.

23 § 686. Adjournments. (a) The court may adjourn a fact-finding hearing
24 or a dispositional hearing for good cause shown on its own motion or on
25 motion made on behalf of the child, or on motion of the petitioner-
26 parent or of the respondent-parent.

27 (b) At the conclusion of a fact-finding hearing and after it has made
28 findings required before a dispositional hearing may commence, the court
29 may adjourn the proceedings to enable it to make inquiry into the
30 surroundings, conditions, and capacities of the persons involved in the
31 proceedings.

32 § 687. Disposition on adjudication of permanent neglect. (a) At the
33 conclusion of a dispositional hearing on a petition for the termination
34 of parental rights with respect to a child, the court shall enter an
35 order of disposition:

36 1. dismissing the petition in accord with section six hundred eighty-
37 eight of this article; or

38 2. suspending judgment in accord with section six hundred eighty-nine
39 of this article; or

40 3. terminating the respondent-parent's parental rights with respect to
41 the child in accordance with section six hundred ninety of this article;
42 provided, however, that an order of disposition terminating parental
43 rights with respect to a child may not be entered after the child's
44 eighteenth birthday, unless the child consents.

45 (b) An order of disposition shall be made, pursuant to this section,
46 solely on the basis of the best interests of the child, and there shall
47 be no presumption that such interests will be promoted by any particular
48 disposition.

49 § 688. Order dismissing petition. (a) If the allegations of a petition
50 under this article are not established, the court shall dismiss the
51 petition.

52 (b) If a motion or application has been made in the course of a
53 proceeding under this article to reconsider an underlying order of
54 termination, or upon the court's own motion on notice to all parties,
55 the court retains jurisdiction to dispose of that motion or application
56 regardless of whether it dismisses the petition.

1 § 689. Suspended judgment. (a) Rules of court shall define permissible
2 terms and conditions of a suspended judgment. These terms and conditions
3 shall relate to the acts or omissions of the respondent-parent.

4 (b) The maximum duration of a suspended judgment under this section is
5 one year, unless the court finds at the conclusion of that period that
6 exceptional circumstances require an extension of that period for one
7 additional period of up to one year. Successive extensions may not be
8 granted.

9 (c) The order of suspended judgment must set forth the duration, terms
10 and conditions of the suspended judgment, and must contain a date
11 certain for a court review not later than thirty days prior to the expi-
12 ration of the period of suspended judgment. The order of suspended judg-
13 ment must also state in conspicuous print that a failure to obey the
14 order may lead to its revocation and to the issuance of an order termi-
15 nating parental rights. A copy of the order of suspended judgment, along
16 with any plan the respondent-parent is to comply with, must be furnished
17 to the respondent-parent.

18 (d) Not later than sixty days before the expiration of the period of
19 suspended judgment, the respondent-parent shall file a report with the
20 family court and all parties, including the petitioner-parent and his or
21 her attorney, the child's attorney and interveners, if any, regarding
22 the respondent-parent's compliance with the terms of suspended judgment.
23 The petitioner-parent, the child's attorney and interveners, if any, may
24 file a response to the respondent-parent's report not later than thirty
25 days before the expiration of the period of suspended judgment. The
26 report and response shall be reviewed by the court on the scheduled
27 court date. Unless a motion or order to show cause has been filed prior
28 to the expiration of the period of suspended judgment alleging a
29 violation or seeking an extension of the period of the suspended judg-
30 ment, the terms of the disposition of suspended judgment shall be deemed
31 satisfied and an order terminating the respondent-parent's parental
32 rights with respect to the child shall not be entered.

33 (e) If, prior to the expiration of the period of the suspended judg-
34 ment, a motion or order to show cause is filed that alleges a violation
35 of the terms and conditions of the suspended judgment, or that seeks to
36 extend the period of the suspended judgment for an additional period of
37 up to one year, then the period of the suspended judgment is tolled
38 until entry of the order that disposes of the motion or order to show
39 cause.

40 (f) Upon finding that the respondent-parent has violated the terms and
41 conditions of the order of suspended judgment, the court may enter an
42 order revoking the order of suspended judgment and terminating the
43 parental rights of the respondent-parent or, where such extension is in
44 the best interests of the child, extend the period of suspended judgment
45 for an additional period of up to one year, if no prior extension has
46 been granted.

47 § 690. Termination of parental rights; further orders. The court may
48 enter an order under section six hundred eighty-seven of this article
49 terminating the respondent-parent's parental rights with respect to the
50 child. An order terminating the respondent-parent's parental rights
51 pursuant to this section shall be granted only upon a finding that the
52 grounds specified in this article are based upon clear and convincing
53 proof.

54 § 691. Issuance of warrant; certificate of warrant. (a) The court may
55 issue a warrant, directing that the respondent be arrested, brought

before the court, when a petition is presented to the court under section six hundred seventy-eight of this article and it appears that:

1. the summons cannot be served; or

2. the respondent-parent has failed to obey the summons; or

3. the respondent-parent is likely to leave the jurisdiction; or

4. a summons, in the court's opinion, would be ineffectual; or

5. the safety of the petitioner-parent or of the child is endangered;

or

6. a respondent-parent on bail or on parole has failed to appear.

(b) The petitioner-parent may not serve a warrant upon the respondent-parent unless the court itself grants such permission upon the application of the petitioner-parent. The clerk of the court may issue to the petitioner-parent a certificate stating that a warrant for the respondent-parent has been issued by the court. The presentation of such certificate by said petitioner or representative to any peace officer, acting pursuant to his or her special duties, or police officer authorizes him or her to arrest the respondent and take him or her to court.

(c) A certificate of warrant expires ninety days from the date of issue but may be renewed from time to time by the clerk of the court.

(d) Rules of court shall provide that a record of all unserved warrants be kept and that periodic reports concerning unserved warrants be made.

§ 2. Paragraph (iv) of subdivision (a) of section 115 of the family court act, as amended by chapter 37 of the laws of 2016, is amended to read as follows:

(iv) proceedings to permanently terminate parental rights to guardianship and custody of a child: (A) by reason of permanent neglect, as set forth in part one of article six of this act and paragraph (d) of subdivision four of section three hundred eighty-four-b of the social services law, (B) by reason of mental illness, intellectual disability and severe or repeated child abuse, as set forth in paragraphs (c) and (e) of subdivision four of section three hundred eighty-four-b of the social services law, ~~and~~ (C) by reason of the death of one or both parents, where no guardian of the person of the child has been lawfully appointed, or by reason of abandonment of the child for a period of six months immediately prior to the filing of the petition, where a child is under the jurisdiction of the family court as a result of a placement in foster care by the family court pursuant to article ten or ten-A of this act or section three hundred fifty-eight-a of the social services law, unless the court declines jurisdiction pursuant to section three hundred eighty-four-b of the social services law, and (D) by reason of permanent neglect, as set forth in article six-A of this act;

§ 3. Severability. If any clause, sentence, paragraph, section or part of this act shall be adjudged by any court of competent jurisdiction to be invalid and after exhaustion of all further judicial review, the judgment shall not affect, impair or invalidate the remainder thereof, but shall be confined in its operation to the clause, sentence, paragraph, section or part of this act directly involved in the controversy in which the judgment shall have been rendered.

§ 4. This act shall take effect on the first of January next succeeding the date on which it shall have become a law. Effective immediately the addition, amendment and/or repeal of any rule or regulation necessary for the implementation of this act on its effective date are authorized to be made and completed on or before such date.