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HOUSE BILL NO. 890
Offered January 10, 2024
Prefiled January 9, 2024

A *BILL to amend and reenact § 20-124.3 of the Code of Virginia, relating to best interests of the child; assuring frequent and continuing contact with both parents.*

Patron—Earley

Referred to Committee on Civil

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That § 20-124.3 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted as follows:

§ 20-124.3. Best interests of the child; parenting time.

In determining best interests of a child for purposes of determining custody or ~~visitation~~ *parenting time* arrangements, including any pendente lite orders pursuant to § 20-103, the court shall, *upon the request of either party, assure a minor child of frequent and continuing contact with both parents so as to maximize the amount of time the minor child spends with each parent, except in cases where there is abuse, neglect, or other pressing safety concern to the child or one of the parents. The court shall consider the following factors when determining the particular custody or parenting time arrangements that will meet the best interests of the child:*

1. The age and physical and mental condition of the child, giving due consideration to the child's changing developmental needs;
2. The age and physical and mental condition of each parent;
3. The relationship existing between each parent and each child, giving due consideration to the positive involvement with the child's life, *and* the ability to accurately assess and meet the emotional, intellectual, and physical needs of the child;
4. The needs of the child, giving due consideration to other important relationships of the child, including but not limited to siblings, peers, and extended family members;
5. The role that each parent has played and will play in the future; in the upbringing and care of the child;
6. The propensity of each parent to actively support the child's contact and relationship with the other parent, including whether a parent has unreasonably denied the other parent access to or ~~visitation~~ *parenting time* with the child;
7. The relative willingness and demonstrated ability of each parent to maintain a close and continuing relationship with the child; and the ability of each parent to cooperate in and resolve disputes regarding matters affecting the child;
8. The reasonable preference of the child, if the court deems the child to be of reasonable intelligence, understanding, age, and experience to express such a preference;
9. Any history of (i) family abuse as that term is defined in § 16.1-228; (ii) sexual abuse; (iii) child abuse; or (iv) an act of violence, force, or threat as defined in § 19.2-152.7:1 that occurred no earlier than 10 years prior to the date a petition is filed. If the court finds such a history or act, the court may disregard the factors in subdivision 6; and
10. Such other factors as the court deems necessary and proper to the determination.

The judge shall communicate to the parties the basis of the decision either orally or in writing. Except in cases of consent orders for custody and ~~visitation~~ *parenting time*, this communication shall set forth the judge's findings regarding the relevant factors set forth in this section. At the request of either party, the court may order that the exchange of a child shall take place at an appropriate meeting place.