

# HOUSE . . . . . No. 1599

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## The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

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In the Year Two Thousand Nine  
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An Act relative to parental choice of terminology in certain domestic relations matters..

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:*

1           SECTION 1. Chapter 208 of the General Laws is hereby amended by inserting after  
2   Section 31, a new section as follows: -

3           Section 31B. Parental rights and responsibilities; parenting plans; use of terms.

4           In agreements relative to custody or parenting plans pursuant to section 31 of this  
5   chapter, the parties may use alternative terms if they specifically agree to do so in writing. The  
6   following terms may be substituted, the definitions of which are identical to the terms contained  
7   in section 31.. Any provision of law or court order or court rule that allocates “parental rights and  
8   responsibilities” shall correspond to the definitions of custody as provided in section 31 and any  
9   provision of law or court order or court rule that refers to the “custody” of minor children shall  
10   correspond to the definitions in this section.

11          For the purposes of this chapter, the following terms shall, unless the context clearly  
12   requires otherwise, have the following meanings:

13           “Sole decision making responsibility,” one parent shall have the right and responsibility  
14 to make major decisions regarding the child’s welfare including matters of education, medical  
15 care and emotional, moral and religious development. This term corresponds with “sole legal  
16 custody.”

17           “Shared decision making responsibility,” continued mutual responsibility and  
18 involvement by both parents in major decisions regarding the child’s welfare including matters  
19 of education, medical care and emotional, moral and religious development. This term  
20 corresponds with “shared legal custody.”

21           “Primary residential responsibility,” a child shall reside with and be under the supervision  
22 of one parent, subject to reasonable time with the other parent, unless the court determines that  
23 such time with the other parent would not be in the best interest of the child. This term  
24 corresponds with “sole physical custody.”

25           “Shared residential responsibility,” a child shall have periods of residing with and being  
26 under the supervision of each parent; provided, however, that such periods shall be shared by the  
27 parents in such a way as to assure a child frequent and continued contact with both parents. This  
28 term corresponds with “shared physical custody.”

29           “Parental rights and responsibilities,” all rights and responsibilities parents have  
30 concerning their child, including decision-making responsibility and residential responsibility.  
31 This term corresponds with “custody.”

32           “Parenting plan,” a written plan describing the rights and responsibilities of each parent.  
33 A parenting plan may include, without limitation, provisions relating to:

- 34           (1)   decision-making responsibility and residential responsibility;
- 35           (2)   information sharing and access, including telephone and electronic access;
- 36           (3)   legal residence of a child for school attendance;
- 37           (4)   parenting schedule, including
- 38           (i)   holiday, birthday and vacation planning,
- 39           (ii)  weekends, including holidays and school in-service days preceding or following
- 40   weekends;
- 41           (5)   transportation and exchange of the child;
- 42           (6)   relocation of parents;
- 43           (7)   the safety of the child and of the parents;
- 44           (8)   procedure for review and adjustment of the plan; and
- 45           (9)   methods for resolving disputes.