

AN ACT

RELATING TO CHILDREN; PROVIDING CRITERIA TO DETERMINE IF PARENTAL RIGHTS SHOULD BE TERMINATED WHEN A CHILD HAS BEEN IN THE CUSTODY OF THE CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES DEPARTMENT FOR A LENGTHY PERIOD; AMENDING A SECTION OF THE CHILDREN'S CODE.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF NEW MEXICO:

Section 1. Section 32A-4-29 NMSA 1978 (being Laws 1993, Chapter 77, Section 123, as amended) is amended to read:

"32A-4-29. TERMINATION PROCEDURE. --

A. A motion to terminate parental rights may be filed at any stage of the abuse or neglect proceeding. The proceeding may be initiated by any of the following:

- (1) the department;
- (2) a licensed child placement agency; or
- (3) any other person having a legitimate interest in the matter, including the child's guardian ad litem, a petitioner for adoption, a foster parent or a relative of the child.

B. The motion for termination of parental rights shall be signed, verified by the moving party and filed with the court. The motion shall set forth:

- (1) the date, place of birth and marital

status of the child, if known;

(2) the grounds for termination and the facts and circumstances supporting the grounds for termination;

(3) the names and addresses of the persons or authorized agency or agency officer to whom custody might be transferred;

(4) whether the child resides or has resided with a foster parent who desires to adopt this child;

(5) whether the motion is in contemplation of adoption;

(6) the relationship or legitimate interest of the moving party to the child; and

(7) whether the child is subject to the federal Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 and, if so:

(a) the tribal affiliations of the child's parents;

(b) the specific actions taken by the moving party to notify the parents' tribes and the results of the contacts, including the names, addresses, titles and telephone numbers of the persons contacted. Copies of any correspondence with the tribes shall be attached as exhibits to the petition; and

(c) what specific efforts were made to comply with the placement preferences set forth in the

federal Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 or the placement preferences of the appropriate Indian tribes.

C. A parent who has not previously been a party to the proceeding shall be named in the motion and shall become a party to the proceeding unless the court determines that the parent has not established a protected liberty interest in his relationship with the child.

D. Notice of the filing of the motion, accompanied by a copy of the motion, shall be served by the moving party on all other parties, the foster parent, preadoptive parent or relative providing care for the child with whom the child is residing, foster parents with whom the child has resided for six months within the previous twelve months, the custodian of the child, any person appointed to represent any party and any other person the court orders. Service shall be in accordance with the Rules of Civil Procedure for the District Courts for the service of motions in a civil action in this state, except that foster parents and attorneys of record in this proceeding shall be served by certified mail. The notice shall state specifically that the person served shall file a written response to the motion within twenty days if the person intends to contest the termination. In any case involving a child subject to the federal Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978, notice shall also be sent by certified mail to the tribes of the child's

parents and upon any "Indian custodian" as that term is defined in 25 U.S.C. Section 1903(6). Further notice shall not be required on a parent who has been provided notice previously pursuant to Section 32A-4-17 NMSA 1978 and who failed to make an appearance.

E. If the identity or whereabouts of a person entitled to service are unknown, the moving party shall file a motion for an order granting service by publication supported by the affidavit of the moving party or his agent or attorney detailing the efforts made to locate the person entitled to service. Upon being satisfied that reasonable efforts to locate the person entitled to service have been made and that information as to the identity or whereabouts of the person is still insufficient to effect service in accordance with the Rules of Civil Procedure for the District Courts, the court shall order service by publication pursuant to the Rules of Civil Procedure for the District Courts.

F. After a motion for the termination of parental rights is filed, the parent shall be advised of the right to counsel unless the parent is already represented by counsel. Counsel shall be appointed, upon request, for any parent who is unable to obtain counsel due to financial reasons or, if in the court's discretion, the interests of justice require appointment of counsel.

G. The court shall assure that a guardian ad

litem represents the child in all proceedings for the termination of parental rights.

H. When a motion to terminate parental rights is filed, the moving party shall request a hearing on the motion. The hearing date shall be at least thirty days, but no more than sixty days, after service is effected upon the parties entitled to service under this section.

I. In any action for the termination of parental rights brought by a party other than the department and involving a child in the custody of the department, the department may:

(1) litigate a motion for the termination of parental rights that was initially filed by another party; or

(2) move that the motion for the termination of parental rights be found premature and denied.

J. When a motion to terminate parental rights is filed, the department shall perform concurrent planning.

K. When a child has been in the custody of the department for not less than fifteen of the previous twenty-two months, the department shall file a motion to terminate parental rights, unless:

(1) a parent has made substantial progress toward eliminating the problem that caused the child's placement in foster care; it is likely that the child will be able to safely return to the parent's home within three

months; and the child's return to the parent's home will be in the child's best interests;

(2) the child has a close and positive relationship with a parent and a permanent plan that does not include termination of parental rights will provide the most secure and appropriate placement for the child;

(3) the child is thirteen years of age or older, is firmly opposed to termination of parental rights and is likely to disrupt an attempt to place him with an adoptive family;

(4) a parent is terminally ill, but in remission, and does not want his parental rights to be terminated; provided that the parent has designated a guardian for his child;

(5) the child is not capable of functioning if placed in a family setting. In such a case, the court shall reevaluate the status of the child every ninety days unless there is a final court determination that the child cannot be placed in a family setting;

(6) grounds do not exist for termination of parental rights;

(7) the child is an unaccompanied, refugee minor and the situation regarding the child involves international legal issues or compelling foreign policy issues; or

(8) adoption is not an appropriate plan for the child.

L. The grounds for any attempted termination shall be proved by clear and convincing evidence. In any proceeding involving a child subject to the federal Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978, the grounds for any attempted termination shall be proved beyond a reasonable doubt and shall meet the requirements set forth in 25 U.S.C. Section 1912(f).

M. When the court terminates parental rights, it shall appoint a custodian for the child and fix responsibility for the child's support.

N. In any termination proceeding involving a child subject to the federal Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978, the court shall in any termination order make specific findings that the requirements of that act have been met.

O. A judgment of the court terminating parental rights divests the parent of all legal rights and privileges and dispenses with both the necessity for the consent to or receipt of notice of any subsequent adoption proceeding concerning the child. A judgment of the court terminating parental rights shall not affect the child's rights of inheritance from and through the child's biological parents."

Section 2. EFFECTIVE DATE. --The effective date of the provisions of this act is July 1, 2001. _____

