

**403.270 Custodial issues -- Best interests of child to be determining factor --
Rebuttable presumption that joint custody and equally shared parenting time
is in child's best interests -- De facto custodian.**

- (1)
 - (a) As used in this chapter and KRS 405.020, unless the context requires otherwise, "de facto custodian" means a person who has been shown by clear and convincing evidence to have been the primary caregiver for, and financial supporter of, a child who within the last two (2) years has resided with the person for an aggregate period of six (6) months or more if the child is under three (3) years of age and for an aggregate period of one (1) year or more if the child is three (3) years of age or older or has been placed by the Department for Community Based Services. Any period of time after a legal proceeding has been commenced by a parent seeking to regain custody of the child shall not be included in determining whether the child has resided with the person for the required minimum period.
 - (b) A person shall not be a de facto custodian until a court determines by clear and convincing evidence that the person meets the definition of de facto custodian established in paragraph (a) of this subsection. Once a court determines that a person meets the definition of de facto custodian, the court shall give the person the same standing in custody matters that is given to each parent under this section and KRS 403.280, 403.340, 403.350, 403.822, and 405.020.
- (2) The court shall determine custody in accordance with the best interests of the child and equal consideration shall be given to each parent and to any de facto custodian. Subject to KRS 403.315, there shall be a presumption, rebuttable by a preponderance of evidence, that joint custody and equally shared parenting time is in the best interests of the child. If a deviation from equal parenting time is warranted, the court shall construct a parenting time schedule which maximizes the time each parent or de facto custodian has with the child and is consistent with ensuring the child's welfare.
- (3) In making a determination of custody, the court shall, prior to consideration of any other factors enumerated in subsection (4) of this section:
 - (a) Consider any allegations of:
 1. Domestic violence and abuse as defined in KRS 403.720; or
 2. An abused or neglected child as defined in KRS 600.020; committed by one (1) party against another party or a child of the parties; and
 - (b) Make written findings on the record as to the impact, if any, of the allegations described in paragraph (a) of this subsection on the child.
- (4) After making the consideration required in subsection (3) of this section, the court shall consider all other factors relevant to the determination of custody including:
 - (a) The wishes of the child's parent or parents, and any de facto custodian, as to his or her custody;
 - (b) The wishes of the child as to his or her custodian, with due consideration given to the influence a parent or de facto custodian may have over the child's wishes;

- (c) The interaction and interrelationship of the child with his or her parent or parents, his or her siblings, and any other person who may significantly affect the child's best interests;
 - (d) The motivation of the adults participating in the custody proceeding;
 - (e) The child's adjustment and continuing proximity to his or her home, school, and community;
 - (f) The mental and physical health of all individuals involved;
 - (g) A finding by the court that domestic violence and abuse, as defined in KRS 403.720, has been committed by one (1) of the parties against a child of the parties or against another party. The court shall determine the extent to which the domestic violence and abuse has affected the child and the child's relationship to each party, with due consideration given to efforts made by a party toward the completion of any domestic violence treatment, counseling, or program;
 - (h) A finding by the court that a party has maliciously made an intentionally false allegation of child abuse which has no basis in fact and which the party knew had no basis in fact against another party;
 - (i) The extent to which the child has been cared for, nurtured, and supported by any de facto custodian;
 - (j) The intent of the parent or parents in placing the child with a de facto custodian;
 - (k) The circumstances under which the child was placed or allowed to remain in the custody of a de facto custodian, including whether the parent now seeking custody was previously prevented from doing so as a result of domestic violence as defined in KRS 403.720 and whether the child was placed with a de facto custodian to allow the parent now seeking custody to seek employment, work, or attend school; and
 - (l) The likelihood a party will allow the child frequent, meaningful, and continuing contact with the other parent or de facto custodian, except that the court shall not consider this likelihood if there is a finding that the other parent or de facto custodian engaged in domestic violence and abuse, as defined in KRS 403.720, against the party or a child and that a continuing relationship with the other parent will endanger the health or safety of either that party or the child.
- (5) The abandonment of the family residence by a custodial party shall not be considered where that party was physically harmed or was seriously threatened with physical harm by his or her spouse, when the harm or threat of harm was causally related to the abandonment.
- (6) If the court grants custody to a de facto custodian, the de facto custodian shall have legal custody under the laws of the Commonwealth.

Effective: July 15, 2026

History: Amended 2026 Ky. Acts ch. 92, sec. 3, effective July 15, 2026. -- Amended 2021 Ky. Acts ch. 132, sec. 1, effective June 29, 2021. -- Amended 2018 Ky. Acts ch. 198, sec. 1, effective July 14, 2018. -- Amended 2004 Ky. Acts ch. 133, sec. 42,

effective July 13, 2004. -- Amended 2000 Ky. Acts ch. 14, sec. 51, effective July 14, 2000. -- Amended 1998 Ky. Acts ch. 250, sec. 1, effective July 15, 1998. -- Amended 1992 Ky. Acts ch. 169, sec. 2, effective July 14, 1992. -- Amended 1980 Ky. Acts ch. 158, sec. 1, effective July 15, 1980. -- Amended 1978 Ky. Acts ch. 86, sec. 1, effective June 17, 1978; and ch. 369, sec. 1, effective June 17, 1978. -- Created 1972 Ky. Acts ch. 182, sec. 17.