

# **Louisiana Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Resource Guide**



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## **Contents**

A guide to assist grandparents who are raising their grandchildren with basic legal and social services information. If you need legal advice specific to your own situation please call an attorney. If you cannot afford an attorney call one of the Legal Services or Pro Bono Project offices listed in this publication.

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## **GRANDPARENT RIGHTS TO CUSTODY OR VISITATION WITH THEIR GRANDCHILDREN**

In general, grandparent rights to their grandchildren are limited. The U.S. Supreme Court in the year 2000 reaffirmed the fundamental right of parents to make all decisions concerning the welfare of their children. The court limited the right of grandparents to interfere with the decisions of the parents only in extraordinary circumstances. Thus, in Louisiana, grandparent rights to their grandchildren are limited.

### **GRANDPARENT VISITATION RIGHTS IN LOUISIANA**

Grandparents have several options if they desire parents to maintain custody of their grandchildren but still want a set schedule of visitation so they can be assured contact with their grandchildren. A grandparent has the right to file suit in court to ask for visitation rights in the following circumstances:

A divorce petition is pending between the mother and father of the grandchildren. A grandparent may intervene in the divorce to ask for visitation with the grandchildren. The grandparent will have to prove extraordinary circumstances exist which make it in the best interest of the grandchild to have visitation. The judge will consider the length and quality of the prior relationship between the grandchild and grandparent, whether the grandparent can uniquely provide guidance and support to the grandchild that the parent cannot, the grandchild's wishes, and the mental and physical

health of the grandparent. Also, the judge will consider the willingness of the grandparent to encourage a good relationship between parent and child;

A grandparent may sue for visitation even if there is no pending divorce between the parents when the grandparent's child is sentenced to jail, is dead, or is declared by a judge to be insane. The parents must have lived together. Also, the grandparent may sue for visitation if the parents are married and have lived separately for more than six months. A judge will grant visitation if the grandparent proves it is in the best interest of the child;

A grandparent may sue for visitation rights when their grandchild has been placed in foster care by the state because of abuse or neglect by the parents and the parental rights of the parents have been terminated.

## **GRANDPARENT CUSTODIAL RIGHTS IN LOUISIANA**

Grandparents may ask for legal custody of grandchildren in the following circumstances:

If the parents have filed for custody in a divorce petition, the grandparents may intervene and ask the judge to award them custody. The grandparents will have to prove that maintaining custody of the grandchild with the parents would substantially harm the child. This burden of proof is difficult to overcome and could result in the parents

maintaining custody even though the child would be better off living with the grandparents. Generally, the judge would have to find that the parents are abusing or neglecting the grandchild to award custody to grandparents;

If parents are abusing their child, grandparents may file a protective order on behalf of the grandchild asking that they obtain temporary custody of the child. A judge could grant an immediate order of custody. A hearing would be held within 30 days during which the grandparents would have to prove the abuse to the judge. If abuse is proven at the hearing, the judge may award custody to the grandparents for between six and eighteen months. Protective orders are designed to provide emergency relief, so it is relatively easy for the grandparents to appear at the clerk of court in the parish where the abuse has occurred and file the protective order without the help of an attorney. However, it is always better to seek advice from an attorney;

Grandparents may request legal custody of their grandchild when the state has obtained custody of the grandchild because of abuse or neglect. It is the policy of the state to attempt to place abused children with relatives before they are placed in foster care;

If the parents are in agreement that the grandparents should have custody of the child, they may sign a Voluntary Transfer of Custody. This document is an agreement which transfers custody from the parents to the grandparents and is signed by a judge. It can be permanent or

temporary. However, if the parents should ever change their minds about the custody arrangement after the document has been approved by the judge, the parents would have to get the approval of the judge before their custodial rights would be restored.

## **PROVISIONAL CUSTODY BY MANDATE**

The Provisional Custody by Mandate is a Power of Attorney by which a parent may authorize a grandparent to provide care for the grandchild. The document must be signed in front of two witnesses and a notary and must be renewed each year. It can be revoked at anytime by the parent. The document does not transfer legal custody and does not have to be approved by a judge. It merely allows the grandparent to do such things as enroll the grandchild in school or obtain medical care for the grandchild. Grandparents should check with individual school boards to determine if that parish will allow the child to be enrolled with a Provisional Custody by Mandate or whether the grandparent will need legal custody to enroll the grandchild in school.

Louisiana does have a law which allows doctors and schools to provide services for a grandchild without the parent's consent if the grandparent signs an affidavit stating the grandchild lives with the grandparent and the grandparent is unable to contact the parents after reasonable efforts. However, the decision to provide services based on that affidavit is left up to the service provider.

## **ADOPTION**

Adoption differs from legal custody in that if a grandparent adopts the grandchild, the parents' rights are terminated. If the grandparent is awarded merely legal custody, the parents still have a right to visit the grandchild and an obligation to financially support the grandchild.

Grandparents may adopt their grandchild if the parents voluntarily surrender their parental rights or if the parents do not want to voluntarily surrender and the following circumstances exist:

The grandparent has had physical custody of the grandchild for at least six months prior to filing for the adoption;

The parents have refused to comply with a court order of child support for a period of six months without just cause;

The parents have failed to visit, communicate or attempt to communicate with the grandchild for more than six months;

The adoption is in the best interest of the child.

### **Uniform International Child Abduction Prevention Act**

Passed in 2007 Regular Session (Introduced by Senator Broom. LA. R.S. 13:1851 through 1862).

1. Action for abduction prevention measures
  - A. A court on its own motion may order abduction prevention measures in a

- child-custody proceeding if the court finds that the evidence established a credible risk of abduction of the child;
    - B. A party to a child-custody determination, or another individual or entity having a right under the law of this state or any other state to seek a child-custody determination for the child may file a petition seeking abduction prevention measures to protect the child.
- 2. A court of this state has temporary emergency jurisdiction under these provisions;
- 3. Factors to determine risk of abduction. The court shall consider all of the following factors and any evidence of numerous factors that the petitioner or respondent:
  - A. Has previously abducted or attempted to abduct the child;
  - B. Has threatened to abduct the child;
  - C. Has recently engaged in activities that may indicate a planned abduction;
  - D. Has engaged in domestic violence, stalking, or child abuse or neglect;
  - E. Has refused to follow a custody determination;
  - F. Lacks strong familial, financial, emotional, or cultural ties to the United States;
  - G. Has strong familial, financial, emotional, or cultural ties to another country;
  - H. Has used multiple names to attempt to mislead or defraud;



- I. Has engaged in any other conduct the court considers relevant to the risk of abduction;
- 4. Provisions & measures to prevent abductions;
  - A. An imposition of travel restrictions;
  - B. A prohibition of the respondent directly or indirectly, either:
    - (i) Removing the child from the United States without permission of the court or the petitioner's written consent;
    - (ii) Removing or retaining the child in violation of a child-custody determination;
    - (iii) Removing the child from school or a child-care or similar facility;
    - (iv) Approaching the child at any location other than a site designated for supervised visitation.
  - C. Restrictions on child's passport, including, but not limited to, placing child's name in the US Department of State Children's Passport Issuance Alert Program; A requirement that the respondent surrender to the court or the petitioner's attorney any U.S. or foreign passport issued in the child's name, including a passport issued in the name of both the parent and the child; and a prohibition upon the respondent from applying on behalf of the child for a new or replacement passport or visa.

- D. In the abduction prevention order the court may:
1. Limit visitation or order supervised visitation until court orders otherwise;
  2. Require respondent to post a bond or provide other security in an amount sufficient to serve as a financial deterrent to abduction;
  3. Require the respondent to obtain education;

There are other provisions to prevent imminent abduction such as issuing a warrant to take physical custody of the child or directing law enforcement to locate child.

## **Social Service Resources for Grandparents**

### **Recommended Web Sites**

**Generations United** at <http://www.gu.org/> offers an overview of benefits available in all states such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Social Security for Dependents, Medicaid, Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and others. You must contact your local office of each program to apply. Generations United gives links to particular benefit programs for more detailed information; however their overview of each program is quite good. Be sure to read the overviews in full to see which ones may apply to your situation.

Lawhelp.org/la is Louisiana's online guide to free legal information on such topics as custody,

grandparents rights, housing, consumer issues and government benefits.

AARP also has a useful web site for grandparents at [www.aarp.org/families/grandparents](http://www.aarp.org/families/grandparents). You can sign up to receive their quarterly newsletter by clicking on the tab labeled "newsletter". The newsletter is available in English and Spanish.

### **Phone numbers for public benefit programs:**

#### **Office of Family Support (OFS)**

OFS offers information and application for the Kinship Care Subsidy Program, FITAP (financial assistance), Food Stamps, Day Care Assistance and others. The Child Care Assistance Application includes all of the above, plus information on LA CHIP (children's health insurance).

Region I (Orleans) 1-504-838-5630

Serves West Jefferson, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, East Jefferson, Midtown, Algiers.

Region II (Baton Rouge) 1-225-925-4540

Serves East Baton Rouge-North, East Feliciana, Iberville, Pointe Coupee, West Baton Rouge, West Feliciana, East Baton Rouge-South

Region III (Covington) 1-985-893-6215

Serves Livingston, St. Helena, St. Tammany, Tangipahoa, Washington

Region IV (Thibodaux) 1-985-447-0884

Serves Ascension, Assumption, LaFourche, St. Charles, St. James, St. John, Terrebonne

Region V (Lafayette) 1-337-262-2061  
Serves Acadia, Evangeline, St. Mary, Iberia,  
Lafayette, St. Martin, St. Landry, Vermilion

Region VI (Lake Charles) 1-337-491-2173  
Serves Allen, Beauregard, Calcasieu, Cameron,  
Jefferson Davis

Region VII (Alexandria) 1-318-487-5228  
Serves Avoyelles, Catahoula, Concordia, Grant,  
LaSalle, Rapides, Vernon, Winn

Region VIII (Shreveport) 1-318-676-7101  
Serves Bienville, Bossier, Caddo, Claiborne,  
DeSoto, Jackson, Natchitoches, Red River, Sabine,  
Webster

Region IX (Monroe) 1-318-362-3386  
Serves Caldwell, East Carroll, Franklin, Lincoln,  
Madison, Morehouse, Ouachita, Richland, Union,  
Tensas, West Carroll

### **Medicaid and LaChip**

For medical benefits for an eligible child 1-877 -  
252-2447 or on the web at: [www.lachip.org](http://www.lachip.org).

### **Earned Income Tax Credit**

1-800-829-1040 IRS

### **Social Security Office**

1-800-772-1213

Deaf or hard of hearing TTY: 1-800-325-0778  
Information and application for Social Security  
Dependants Benefits

## **Child Support Enforcement Regional Offices**

All information for the entire state is accessed through a single number: La. Child Support Customer Service Center: 1-800-256-4650.

Offices are located in the following cities and towns: New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Amite, Alexandria, Natchitoches, Monroe, Tallulah, Shreveport, Lafayette, Thibodaux, Lake Charles, Ville Platte.

## **Public Housing**

For information about the New Orleans metro area or to get information about other offices in South Louisiana:

New Orleans Regional Office: 1-504-589-7201;  
New Orleans Field Office: 1-504-589-7251

For information about the Shreveport metro area or to get information about other offices in north Louisiana:

Shreveport Field Office: 1-318-226-7030  
Shreveport Policy & Management: 1-318-226-7071

## **Grandparent Support Groups**

### **Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Information Center of Louisiana**

Contact: Dot Thibodeaux 1-225-355-5442  
P.O. Box 74267  
Baton Rouge, LA 70807

[www.grgicl.org](http://www.grgicl.org); [lagrparinfo@yahoo.com](mailto:lagrparinfo@yahoo.com)

## **Alexandria**

### **Family Counseling Agency**

Contact Lesley Parker: 1-318-448-0284  
1404 Murray St., Alexandria, LA 71301

### **Young at Heart**

Volunteers of America of Central Louisiana  
Contact Susan Freundlich: 1-318-445-5464  
3900 Lee Street, Alexandria, LA 71301  
Meets in Alexandria 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday at 11:00 a.m.

## **Baton Rouge**

### **East Baton Rouge Head Start**

Contact Gloria Gilmore: 1-225-358-4504  
Rose Doolittle: 1-225-775-4164  
4523 Plank Road, Baton Rouge  
Meets 3<sup>rd</sup> Friday at 10 a.m.

### **Family Road of Greater Baton Rouge**

Second Time Around  
Contact: Gerrie Baker Allen 1-225-346-8712  
Dot Thibodeaux 1-225-355-5442  
323 E. Airport Avenue, Baton Rouge  
Meets 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday at 10-11:30 a.m.

## **Lake Charles**

### **Volunteers of America**

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Support Group

Contact: Michelle DeJean 1-337-497-0034  
340 Kirby Street  
Lake Charles, LA. 70601  
Meets 2<sup>nd</sup> Friday at 10 - 11 a.m.

## **New Orleans/Metairie**

### **Jewish Children's Regional Services**

Contact: Lisa Taff: 1-504-828-6334  
3500 North Causeway Blvd., Ste.1120  
Metairie, LA. 70002  
Meets 2<sup>nd</sup> Friday at 10 - 11 a.m.;1<sup>st</sup> Wednesday at  
12 - 2 p.m.

### **New Orleans Council on Aging**

Contact: Telesia Brimmer 1-504-821-4121  
2475 Canal Street, Ste. 400, N.O., LA. 70179  
Meets 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday at 10 a.m.

## **New Roads**

### **Grandparents Champion for Parents**

Fr. Joseph Conway Rodney SSJ Community Center  
Contact: Sheila Solomon/Coordinator  
1-225-303-8595 or 225-638-1055  
Fax: 1-225-638-1056  
812 New Road Street  
New Roads, LA. 70760  
Meets 4<sup>th</sup> Friday at 11:30 to 1 p.m.

## **Shreveport**

### **Grace Community United Methodist Church**

Contact: 1-318-865-2070  
9400 Ellerbee Road, Room 100, Shreveport, LA.  
Meets 1<sup>st</sup> Monday at 6:30 p.m.

## **Ruston**

### **Family Counseling Center of Louisiana**

United Methodist Children & and Family Services  
Contact Sharon Kilcoyner: 1-318-255-5753  
Fax: 1-318-242-4698  
901 S. Vienna Street, Ruston, LA 71270-0929  
Meets Thursdays at 5:00 p.m.

## **Union Parish**

### **Grandparents as Parents of Louisiana**

Contact Linda Washington: 1-318-292-4443  
1455 Lee St., Marion, LA 71260  
Group meets at Marion Baptist Church  
Meets 1<sup>st</sup> Tuesday at 6:00 p.m.

## **Legal Service Corporations**

Acadiana Legal Services (Lafayette office):  
1-800-256-1175; Serving: St. Mary, Evangeline, St.  
Landry, Iberia, St. Martin, Allen, Beauregard,  
Calcasieu, Cameron, Jefferson Davis

Legal Services of Central Louisiana: 1-800-256-4343  
Serving: Avoyelles, Rapides, Vernon

Capital Area Legal Services: 1-800-256-1900



Serving: East Baton Rouge, East Feliciana, Iberville, Pointe Coupee, St. John Parishes, West Baton Rouge, West Feliciana

Capital Area Legal Services: 1-800-256-6151  
Serving: Ascension (West), Assumption, St. James

Capital Area Legal Services: 1-800-256-1660  
Serving: Lafourche and Terrebonne

Legal Services of North Louisiana: 1-800-826-9265  
Serving: Bienville, Bossier, Caddo, Claiborne, Webster

Legal Services of North Louisiana: 1-800-259-6591  
Serving: Caldwell, East Carroll, Franklin, Jackson, Lincoln, Madison, Morehouse, Ouachita, Richland, Tensas, Union, West Carroll

Legal Services of North Louisiana: 1-800- 960-9109  
Serving: Catahoula, Concordia, DeSoto, Grant, LaSalle, Natchitoches, Red River, Sabine, Winn

Southeast Louisiana Legal Services (New Orleans Office): 1-877-521-6242  
Serving: Jefferson, Orleans, Plaquemine, St. Bernard, St. Charles

Southeast Louisiana Legal Services (Westbank Office): 1-800- 624-4771  
Serving: Jefferson, Orleans, Plaquemine, St. Bernard, St. Charles

Southeast Louisiana Legal Services (Hammond Office): 1-800-349-0886

Serving: Livingston, St. Helena, Tammany,  
Tangipahoa, Washington

Southeast Louisiana Legal Services (Covington  
Office): 1-800-891-0076

Serving: Livingston, St. Helena, Tammany,  
Tangipahoa, Washington

### **Pro Bono Project & Volunteer Lawyer Projects**

17<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Pro Bono Project:  
1-800-256-1900, Ext. 270, Houma , LA

18<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Pro Bono Project:  
1-800-256-1900, Ext. 270, Plaquemine, LA

20<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Pro Bono Project:  
1-800-256-1900, Ext. 270, Clinton, LA

23<sup>rd</sup> Judicial District Pro Bono Project:  
1-800-256-1900, Ext. 270, Pierre Part, LA

32<sup>nd</sup> Judicial District Pro Bono Project:  
1-800-256-1900, Ext. 270, Houma, LA

40<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Pro Bono Project:  
1-800-256-1900, Ext. 270, LaPlace, LA

Baton Rouge Bar Association Pro Bono Project:  
1-225-344-4803, Baton Rouge, LA

Central Louisiana Pro Bono Project: 1-318-449-9778  
Alexandria, LA

Lafayette Volunteer Lawyers: 1-337-237-4700

Lafayette, LA

The Pro Bono Project: 1-504-581-4043  
New Orleans, LA

Northwest Louisiana Pro Bono Project:  
1-318-221-2205, Shreveport, LA

The listings above are all connected to a Legal Services Corporation Office but have their own private attorney involvement pro bono programs.

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THIS BOOKLET PROVIDES GENERAL LEGAL INFORMATION AND DOES NOT TAKE THE PLACE OF GETTING A LEGAL OPINION FROM A LICENSED ATTORNEY ABOUT YOUR SPECIFIC FACTS. IT WAS ORIGINALLY DEVELOPED BY NORTHWEST PRO BONO PROJECT WITH ASSISTANCE FROM LEGAL SERVICES OF NORTH LOUISIANA AND FUNDED BY A GRANT FROM THE AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION PARTNERSHIPS IN LAW & AGING. THIS REVISED PUBLIC DOCUMENT WAS PUBLISHED AT A TOTAL COST OF \$584.71 FOR 500 COPIES BY THE LOUISIANA RELATIVES AS PARENTS PROGRAM, LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES, OFFICE OF COMMUNITY SERVICES, 427 NORTH 4TH STREET, BATON ROUGE, LA. 70802 IN ACCORDANCE WITH STANDARDS SET BY LA. R.S. 43:31