



ANTHONY J. STASKUNAS
STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 15TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Testimony of Rep. Tony Staskunas, 2001 AB-149
Senate Judiciary, Consumer Affairs and Campaign Finance Reform Committee
March 5, 2002

Chairman and Members of the Senate Judiciary, Consumer Affairs and Campaign Finance Reform Committee: I am Representative Tony Staskunas of the 15th Assembly District, the author of Assembly Bill 149.

I introduced this proposal to require that a judge or family court commissioner order the parties of a divorce or legal separation to attend a program on the effects of divorce on a child and how working together is in the best interest of the child. Under current law, a judge or family court commissioner may order the parties to an action affecting the family (which includes such actions as divorces, paternity actions, and actions related to child support or legal custody) that involves a minor child to attend a program on the effects of a dissolution of marriage on children if the judge or family court commissioner determines it is appropriate and serves the best interest of the child.

The goal of AB 149 is not to reconcile the marriage, but to encourage and educate parents to work together for their kids' best interests.

Milwaukee is one of several Wisconsin counties that currently does require parental counseling. Assembly Bill 149 expands the parenting requirement statewide. Parties in a divorce or legal separation must attend a program that includes instruction on the effects of divorce on a child, and how to work together to serve the best interest of the child. Any program that the parties are ordered to attend must be at least two hours long.

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Assembly Bill 149 includes exemptions to the post-marriage parenting requirement. The court or family court commissioner is not required to order the parties to attend a program if the court or family court commissioner finds that attendance would cause undue hardship or finds, because of evidence of child or spousal abuse or a significant problem with alcohol or other drug abuse, that attendance would endanger the health or safety of one of the parties. The court or family court commissioner is required to condition the granting of the divorce or legal separation on attendance at the program, unless the parties were not ordered to attend because of the exception of undue hardship or endangerment of the health or safety of one of the parties.

Passage of Assembly Bill 149 would be beneficial to the children of divorce situations, as well as to their parents, because while divorce is the end of the marital relationship, it is not the end of the parenting relationship. Parents must continue to work together for their children. Passage of this bill would help to provide education for parents on how to maintain a healthy, stable environment in which to raise their children, after their lives go separate directions.

Last session I authored this proposal as AB 524. AB 524 passed the Assembly Committee on Family Law and the full Assembly unanimously. Unfortunately, it was not taken up by the full Senate prior to the conclusion of the 1999-2000 Legislative Session.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Committee Members, for your kind attention.



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MEMORANDUM

To: Senate Judiciary, Consumer Affairs and Campaign Finance Reform
Committee

From: Family Law Section
Children and the Law Section

Date: March 5, 2002

Re: Support Assembly Bill 149

The State Bar of Wisconsin Family Law Section and Children and the Law Section support Assembly Bill 149, requiring divorcing couples to attend parenting classes.

Attorneys working in counties where these classes are available have found that they are very beneficial to their clients. Families going through a divorce are in stress. Divorcing parents need all the tools possible to continue to provide the emotional support their children will need to survive the stressful situation.

Both the Family Law Section and Children and the Law Section encourage your support for Assembly Bill 149.

Contact Jenny Boese, Senior Government Relations Coordinator, at 608-250-6045 or jboese@wisbar.org with questions.