

HB 1264 – relating to parenting coordinators

Senate Human Services Committee – March 17, 2021

Rep. Karla Rose Hanson

Madam Chair and members of the Senate Human Services Committee, my name is Representative Karla Rose Hanson and I represent District 44.

HB 1264 comes to you at the request of the joint ND Supreme Court / ND Bar Association Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) committee.

Parenting coordinators have long been part of the alternative dispute resolution process for families; the goal is to help families resolve disputes outside of the courtroom. A parenting coordinator acts as a facilitator to assist the parties in resolving a dispute within the boundaries of their court order. A parenting coordinator is a voluntary and efficient way to resolve disputes – it is more expeditious and less expensive than going back to court for every dispute after a divorce is final.

Parenting coordinators serve as an effective tool, and this bill aims to make two small changes to build on their success.

The first change is regarding the term “**parenting time.**” Parents often have disputes about issues other than parenting time, including medical care, where children attend school, and transporting kids. This change allows parenting coordinators to apply the same successful facilitation process to these issues too.

The second change would allow the parenting coordinator to make a written decision if an agreement can’t be facilitated and to **file this report with the court** without breaching confidentiality. If there was an impasse and the parties asked the court for further assistance, providing the court with this report enables the judge assigned to the case to have all information available to make a decision – including what has been tried, the reasoning behind it, and whether other alternatives were offered – so they’re not starting from square one.

These two changes will make parenting coordinators an even more effective tool for families after a divorce. A family law attorney who serves on the ADR committee has provided testimony in support of these changes, including additional details on this valuable role, and that should be available to you in LAWS.

Thank you, Madam Chair and Committee Members, for considering HB 1264. I’d urge a do-pass recommendation and I’ll stand for any questions.