

Chapter 353

(Senate Bill 472)

AN ACT concerning

Family Law – Grounds for Divorce – Mutual Consent

FOR the purpose of authorizing a court to decree an absolute divorce on the grounds of mutual consent ~~if the parties have executed a written settlement agreement that resolves certain contested issues between the parties; requiring the parties to jointly file a certain complaint and include a certain affidavit with the complaint in order to initiate proceedings for an absolute divorce on the grounds of mutual consent~~ under certain circumstances; authorizing a court to merge or incorporate a certain settlement agreement into a certain divorce decree; authorizing a court to modify or enforce a certain settlement agreement consistent with certain provisions of law; and generally relating to the grounds for an absolute divorce.

BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,
 Article – Family Law
 Section 7–103
 Annotated Code of Maryland
 (2012 Replacement Volume and 2014 Supplement)

SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND,
 That the Laws of Maryland read as follows:

Article – Family Law

7–103.

(a) The court may decree an absolute divorce on the following grounds:

(1) adultery;

(2) desertion, if:

(i) the desertion has continued for 12 months without interruption before the filing of the application for divorce;

(ii) the desertion is deliberate and final; and

(iii) there is no reasonable expectation of reconciliation;

(3) conviction of a felony or misdemeanor in any state or in any court of the United States if before the filing of the application for divorce the defendant has:

(i) been sentenced to serve at least 3 years or an indeterminate sentence in a penal institution; and

(ii) served 12 months of the sentence;

(4) 12-month separation, when the parties have lived separate and apart without cohabitation for 12 months without interruption before the filing of the application for divorce;

(5) insanity if:

(i) the insane spouse has been confined in a mental institution, hospital, or other similar institution for at least 3 years before the filing of the application for divorce;

(ii) the court determines from the testimony of at least 2 physicians who are competent in psychiatry that the insanity is incurable and there is no hope of recovery; and

(iii) 1 of the parties has been a resident of this State for at least 2 years before the filing of the application for divorce;

(6) cruelty of treatment toward the complaining party or a minor child of the complaining party, if there is no reasonable expectation of reconciliation; [or]

(7) excessively vicious conduct toward the complaining party or a minor child of the complaining party, if there is no reasonable expectation of reconciliation; OR

(8) MUTUAL CONSENT, IF:

(I) THE PARTIES DO NOT HAVE ANY MINOR CHILDREN IN COMMON;

~~(II)~~ (II) THE PARTIES HAVE EXECUTED EXECUTE AND SUBMIT TO THE COURT A WRITTEN SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT SIGNED BY BOTH PARTIES THAT RESOLVES ALL CONTESTED ISSUES BETWEEN THE PARTIES, INCLUDING ISSUES RELATING TO:

~~(H)~~ 1. ALIMONY; AND

~~(H)~~ 2. THE DISTRIBUTION OF PROPERTY, INCLUDING THE RELIEF PROVIDED IN §§ 8-205 AND 8-208 OF THIS ARTICLE; AND

~~(H)~~ 3. THE CARE, CUSTODY, ACCESS, AND SUPPORT OF MINOR OR DEPENDENT CHILDREN;

~~(II) IF THE SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT PROVIDES FOR THE PAYMENT OF CHILD SUPPORT, THE PARTIES ATTACH TO THE SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT A COMPLETED CHILD SUPPORT GUIDELINES WORKSHEET;~~

~~(III) NEITHER PARTY FILES A PLEADING TO SET ASIDE THE SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT PRIOR TO THE DIVORCE HEARING REQUIRED UNDER THE MARYLAND RULES; AND~~

~~(IV) AFTER REVIEWING THE SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT, THE COURT IS SATISFIED THAT ANY TERMS OF THE AGREEMENT RELATING TO MINOR OR DEPENDENT CHILDREN ARE IN THE BEST INTERESTS OF THOSE CHILDREN.~~

~~(IV) BOTH PARTIES APPEAR BEFORE THE COURT AT THE ABSOLUTE DIVORCE HEARING.~~

(b) Recrimination is not a bar to either party obtaining an absolute divorce on the grounds set forth in subsection (a)(1) through (7) of this section, but is a factor to be considered by the court in a case involving the ground of adultery.

(c) Res judicata with respect to another ground under this section is not a bar to either party obtaining an absolute divorce on the ground of 12-month separation.

(d) Condonation is not an absolute bar to a decree of an absolute divorce on the ground of adultery, but is a factor to be considered by the court in determining whether the divorce should be decreed.

(e) (1) A court may decree an absolute divorce even if a party has obtained a limited divorce.

(2) If a party obtained a limited divorce on the ground of desertion that at the time of the decree did not meet the requirements of subsection (a)(2) of this section, the party may obtain an absolute divorce on the ground of desertion when the desertion meets the requirements of subsection (a)(2) of this section.

~~(F) TO INITIATE PROCEEDINGS FOR AN ABSOLUTE DIVORCE ON THE GROUNDS OF MUTUAL CONSENT, THE PARTIES SHALL:~~

~~(1) JOINTLY FILE A COMPLAINT FOR ABSOLUTE DIVORCE; AND~~

~~(2) INCLUDE WITH THE COMPLAINT AN AFFIDAVIT, SIGNED BY BOTH PARTIES, EVIDENCING THAT THE PARTIES:~~

~~(1) CONSENT TO THE DIVORCE; AND~~

~~(H) HAVE EXECUTED A WRITTEN SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT THAT MEETS THE REQUIREMENTS OF SUBSECTION (A)(8) OF THIS SECTION.~~

(F) IF A COURT DECREES AN ABSOLUTE DIVORCE ON THE GROUNDS OF MUTUAL CONSENT UNDER SUBSECTION (A)(8) OF THIS SECTION, THE COURT MAY:

(1) MERGE OR INCORPORATE THE SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT INTO THE DIVORCE DECREE; AND

(2) MODIFY OR ENFORCE THE SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT CONSISTENT WITH TITLE 8, SUBTITLE 1 OF THIS ARTICLE.

SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect October 1, 2015.

Approved by the Governor, May 12, 2015.