

Illinois Dissolution of Marriage Act

Illinois Dissolution of Marriage Act is a legal framework that governs the process of divorce in the state of Illinois. The Act outlines the rights and responsibilities of spouses, the procedures for filing for divorce, the division of property, and child custody considerations. Understanding the Illinois Dissolution of Marriage Act is essential for anyone navigating the complexities of divorce in this state. This article provides a comprehensive overview of the Act, its provisions, and the implications for individuals seeking to dissolve their marriage.

Overview of the Illinois Dissolution of Marriage Act

The Illinois Dissolution of Marriage Act, codified in 750 ILCS 5, provides the legal procedures for obtaining a divorce in Illinois. The Act emphasizes the importance of both parties' rights during the dissolution process and aims to facilitate a fair resolution of marital issues.

Grounds for Dissolution

In Illinois, the primary ground for dissolution of marriage is irreconcilable differences. The Act requires that the couple live separately and apart for a minimum of six months before filing for divorce, although this period may be waived if both parties agree.

Other grounds for divorce include:

1. **Adultery:** One spouse engages in sexual relations outside the marriage.
2. **Abandonment:** One spouse leaves the other without a reasonable cause for a period exceeding one year.
3. **Mental Illness:** One spouse has been declared mentally ill for at least two years.
4. **Substance Abuse:** One spouse has a habit of excessive drinking or drug use that significantly affects the marriage.

However, the prevailing ground remains irreconcilable differences, as it allows couples to end their marriage without assigning blame.

Filing for Dissolution of Marriage

The process of filing for a dissolution of marriage in Illinois involves several steps:

1. Residency Requirements

To file for divorce in Illinois, at least one spouse must have been a resident of the state for a minimum of 90 days immediately preceding the filing.

2. Preparation of Documents

The following documents are typically required to initiate the divorce process:

- Petition for Dissolution of Marriage: This document outlines the grounds for divorce and requests the court to dissolve the marriage.
- Summons: This is a legal notice to the other spouse that a divorce action has been initiated.
- Joint Preliminary Injunction: This may be filed to prevent either spouse from making significant changes to finances or property during the divorce process.

3. Filing the Petition

The petition and accompanying documents must be filed with the circuit court in the county where either spouse resides. Upon filing, a filing fee is typically required, which can vary by county.

4. Serving the Other Spouse

Once the petition is filed, the other spouse must be formally served with the documents. This can be done through a process server or by mail, depending on the circumstances.

Divorce Proceedings

After the petition is served, the divorce proceedings commence, which can involve several stages:

1. Response from the Other Spouse

The spouse receiving the petition has 30 days to respond. If they fail to respond, the court may grant a default judgment in favor of the filing spouse.

2. Discovery Process

During the discovery phase, both spouses gather information and evidence relevant to the divorce, including financial records, property documents, and other pertinent information.

3. Mediation and Settlement

Illinois encourages couples to resolve their issues through mediation. Mediation sessions provide a platform for both parties to discuss their disagreements with the help of a neutral mediator. If an

agreement is reached, it can be formalized into a settlement agreement.

4. Trial

If mediation fails, the case may proceed to trial. At trial, both parties present their evidence and arguments, and the judge makes a final ruling on contested issues, such as property division, child custody, and support.

Property Division and Alimony

One of the key aspects of the Illinois Dissolution of Marriage Act is the equitable distribution of marital property.

1. Marital vs. Non-Marital Property

In Illinois, property acquired during the marriage is typically considered marital property, while property owned before the marriage or received as a gift or inheritance is considered non-marital property.

2. Equitable Distribution

The Act prescribes that marital property must be divided equitably, although not necessarily equally. Factors considered by the court include:

- The duration of the marriage
- Each spouse's economic circumstances
- Contributions to the marital property
- The custody arrangement for children

3. Alimony (Spousal Support)

Alimony, or spousal support, may be awarded to either spouse depending on several factors, such as the length of the marriage, the financial needs of the recipient, and the ability of the other spouse to pay. The Illinois Marriage and Dissolution of Marriage Act specifies guidelines for the calculation of spousal support, but the court retains discretion in determining the final amount and duration.

Child Custody and Support

Divorcing couples with children must address issues related to child custody and support under the

1. Child Custody

Illinois law prioritizes the best interests of the child when determining custody arrangements. The court may award sole or joint custody, and factors influencing custody decisions include:

- The child's wishes (if of sufficient age)
- Each parent's involvement in the child's life
- The mental and physical health of both parents
- The child's adjustment to home, school, and community

2. Child Support

Child support is calculated based on guidelines set by the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services. The primary considerations include:

- The income of both parents
- The number of children
- The needs of the child

Both parents are required to contribute to the child's upbringing, and the court may adjust support obligations based on changes in circumstances.

Conclusion

The Illinois Dissolution of Marriage Act provides a structured approach for individuals seeking to end their marriage. By understanding the provisions of the Act, individuals can navigate the divorce process more effectively, ensuring their rights and responsibilities are upheld. From filing for divorce to addressing property division, alimony, and child custody, the Act covers various aspects of marital dissolution. Seeking legal counsel can further assist individuals in understanding their options and making informed decisions during this challenging time.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the grounds for dissolution of marriage in Illinois?

In Illinois, the primary ground for dissolution of marriage is irreconcilable differences. The couple must live separately for at least six months before filing for divorce, unless both parties agree to waive this requirement.

How is property divided during a dissolution of marriage in Illinois?

Illinois follows the principle of equitable distribution, meaning that marital property is divided fairly but not necessarily equally. The court considers various factors, including the length of the marriage, each spouse's contribution, and economic circumstances.

What is the difference between legal separation and dissolution of marriage in Illinois?

Legal separation allows couples to live apart while remaining legally married, often for reasons such as religious beliefs or financial considerations. Dissolution of marriage, on the other hand, ends the marriage legally.

Do I need to hire an attorney for a dissolution of marriage in Illinois?

While it is not legally required to hire an attorney for a dissolution of marriage in Illinois, it is highly recommended, especially in cases involving complex issues like custody, property division, and support.

How long does the dissolution of marriage process take in Illinois?

The duration of the dissolution process varies depending on factors like the complexity of the case and whether it is contested. An uncontested divorce can take as little as a few months, while a contested divorce may take a year or longer.

What is the role of mediation in the Illinois dissolution of marriage process?

Mediation is often encouraged in Illinois to help couples resolve disputes amicably. A neutral mediator assists both parties in negotiating terms such as property division, child custody, and support, potentially reducing the need for court intervention.

Can I modify my divorce decree in Illinois after the dissolution of marriage?

Yes, divorce decrees can be modified in Illinois, but only under certain circumstances, such as significant changes in income, employment, or living arrangements. Modifications typically pertain to child support, spousal support, and custody arrangements.

What is the waiting period for filing a dissolution of marriage in Illinois?

There is no mandatory waiting period to file for dissolution of marriage in Illinois, but if the grounds

for divorce are based on irreconcilable differences, the couple must have lived separately for at least six months before the court can finalize the divorce.

Are there any residency requirements to file for dissolution of marriage in Illinois?

Yes, at least one spouse must reside in Illinois for at least 90 days prior to filing for dissolution of marriage. This ensures that the court has jurisdiction over the case.

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