

- SUBJECT:** Authorizing a domestic relations office to modify certain court orders
- COMMITTEE:** Juvenile Justice and Family Issues — committee substitute recommended
- VOTE:** 9 ayes — Neave, Swanson, Cook, Frank, Leach, Ramos, Talarico, Vasut, Wu  
0 nays
- WITNESSES:** For — Jane McMahon, Texas Association of Domestic Relations Offices and Harris County DRO; William Morris, Texas Family Law Foundation; (*Registered, but did not testify:* Melissa Shannon, Bexar County Commissioners Court; Charles Reed, Dallas County Commissioners Court; Ender Reed, Harris County Commissioners Court; Amy Bresnen, Texas Family Law Foundation)  
  
Against — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Jeffrey Morgan)
- BACKGROUND:** Family Code sec. 203.001 defines "domestic relations office" (DRO) as a county office that serves families, county departments, and courts to ensure effective implementation of suits affecting the parent-child relationship. Sec. 203.002 allows a commissioner's court to establish a DRO. Sec. 203.004, which governs the powers and duties of a DRO, allows a DRO to file a suit to:
- enforce a court order for child support or for possession of and access to a child; and
  - modify or clarify an existing child support order.
- DIGEST:** CSHB 3962 would authorize a domestic relations office (DRO) in a suit affecting the parent-child relationship to modify or clarify a court order for possession of and access to a child.
- The bill would specify that a DRO was authorized to provide information to assist a party in understanding, complying with, or enforcing the party's duties and obligations under a suit relating to the parent-child relationship

and to a suit affecting the parent-child relationship.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2021.

**SUPPORTERS  
SAY:**

CSHB 3962 would enable domestic relations offices (DROs) across the state to better serve Texas children and help families with custody and visitation cases as a one-stop economical resource. Under current law, a DRO may enforce a possession or access order to a child, but the statute does not provide a DRO specific authority to modify such an order.

However, it is often necessary to modify these orders. A parent, for example, may be unable to visit with the parent's child because the possession or access order is no longer enforceable due to unenforceable court order. When a parent loses access to a child due to an unenforceable order, they face a legal hurdle that can be expensive, time-consuming, and emotionally draining.

By granting a DRO the authority to modify possession or access orders and providing clarification on services available from DROs, the bill would assist parents in understanding their duties and obligation and enable DROs to better serve Texas families.

**CRITICS  
SAY:**

CSHB 3962 would grant DROs, as agents of the state, additional authority to interfere inappropriately with the parent-child relationship.