



**H.B. 303**

125th General Assembly  
(As Introduced)

Rep. Oelslager

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**BILL SUMMARY**

- Creates the Uniform Mediation Act.
- Specifies when the Uniform Mediation Act applies to a mediation proceeding.
- Sets forth specific exclusions from the Uniform Mediation Act and provides parties with an opportunity to opt out from the coverage of the Act.
- Provides that mediation communications are privileged and are not subject to discovery or admissible in evidence except when the privilege is waived by all parties or in specified exceptions.
- Prohibits communications by a mediator in specified circumstances.
- Requires mediators to make a reasonable inquiry before accepting a mediation to determine whether any conflict of interests arise and to disclose any conflicts to the mediation parties as soon as is practicable.
- Provides that mediation communications are confidential to the extent agreed by the parties.
- Provides that an attorney or other individual designated by a party may accompany the party to and participate in a mediation.

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**CONTENT AND OPERATION**

**Uniform Mediation Act**

The bill enacts R.C. 2710.01 through 2710.10, which will be known as the Uniform Mediation Act. The Uniform Mediation Act (UMA) was developed

through a joint study and drafting effort by the National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws and the American Bar Association. The UMA provides guidance for mediation practice in the areas of confidentiality, privilege, and disclosure of conflicts of interest. The UMA will govern a mediation pursuant to a referral or an agreement to mediate made on or after the effective date of this bill. (Section 3 and Section 4.)

### **Scope of the UMA**

#### **General application**

The bill outlines when the UMA applies to a mediation. It also carves out specific exclusions from the UMA's coverage and provides the parties involved in the mediation with the opportunity to opt out of the UMA. The bill provides that, except as provided below in "**Exclusions from the UMA**" and "**Opting out of the UMA**," the UMA applies to a mediation under any of the following circumstances (R.C. 2710.02(A)):

(1) The mediation parties are required to mediate by statute or court or administrative agency rule or referred to mediation by a court, administrative agency, or arbitrator.

(2) The mediation parties and the mediator agree to mediate in a record that demonstrates an expectation that mediation communications will be privileged against disclosure.

(3) The mediation parties use as a mediator an individual who holds himself or herself out as a mediator, or the mediation is provided by a person that holds itself out as providing mediation.

#### **Exclusions from the UMA**

However, the bill states there are specific situations in which the UMA does not apply to a mediation. The UMA does not apply to a mediation in which any of the following apply (R.C. 2710.02(B)):

(1) The mediation relates to the establishment, negotiation, administration, or termination of a collective bargaining relationship.

(2) The mediation relates to a dispute that is pending under or is part of the processes established by a collective bargaining agreement, except that the UMA applies to a mediation arising out of a dispute that has been filed with an administrative agency or court.

(3) The mediation is conducted by a judge who might make a ruling on the case.

(4) The mediation is conducted under the auspices of either a primary or secondary school if all the parties are students or a correctional institution for youths if all the parties are residents of that institution.

### **Opting out of the UMA**

The UMA allows parties involved in a mediation to opt for a non-privileged mediation or mediation session by mutual agreement. The bill provides that if the parties agree in advance in a signed record, or a record of proceeding reflects agreement by the parties, that all or part of a mediation is not privileged, the privileges found in the UMA do not apply to the mediation or part agreed upon. However, the privileges do apply to a mediation communication made by a person that has not received actual notice of the agreement before the communication is made. (R.C. 2710.02(C).)

### **Privilege against disclosure**

R.C. 2710.03 sets forth the evidentiary privilege provisions of the UMA. It provides that, except as otherwise provided below in "**Exceptions to privilege**," a mediation communication is privileged and is not subject to discovery or admissible in evidence in a proceeding unless waived or precluded as provided below in "**Waiver and preclusion of privilege**." (R.C. 2710.03(A).)

The bill further states that in a proceeding, the following privileges apply (R.C. 2710.03(B)):

(1) A mediation party may refuse to disclose, and may prevent any other person from disclosing, a mediation communication.

(2) A mediator may refuse to disclose a mediation communication and may prevent any other person from disclosing a mediation communication of the mediator.

(3) A nonparty participant may refuse to disclose, and may prevent any other person from disclosing, a mediation communication of the nonparty participant.

However, evidence or information that is otherwise admissible or subject to discovery does not become inadmissible or protected from discovery solely by reason of its disclosure or use in a mediation (R.C. 2710.03(C)).

The bill also repeals R.C. 2317.023, which currently regulates the disclosure of mediation communication, and replaces it with R.C. 2710.03.

**Waiver and preclusion of privilege**

R.C. 2710.04 provides for the waiver and preclusion of privilege. The bill states that a privilege described above in "**Privilege against disclosure**" may be waived in a record or orally during a proceeding if it is expressly waived by all mediation parties and by whichever of the following is applicable (R.C. 2710.04(A)):

(1) In the case of the privilege of a mediator, it is expressly waived by the mediator.

(2) In the case of the privilege of a nonparty participant, it is expressly waived by the nonparty participant.

The bill also provides that a person that discloses or makes a representation about a mediation communication that prejudices another person in a proceeding is precluded from asserting a privilege, but only to the extent necessary for the person prejudiced to respond to the representation or disclosure. A person that intentionally uses a mediation to plan, attempt to commit, or commit a crime or to conceal an ongoing crime or ongoing criminal activity is precluded from asserting a privilege under the UMA. (R.C. 2710.04(B) and (C).)

**Exceptions to privilege**

The bill sets forth specific exceptions to the grant of privilege provided to mediation communications. There is no privilege under the UMA for a mediation communication to which any of the following applies (R.C. 2710.05(A)):

(1) The mediation communication is contained in an agreement evidenced by a record signed by all parties to the agreement.

(2) The mediation communication is available to the public under the Public Records Law or made during a session of a mediation that is open, or is required by law to be open, to the public.

(3) The mediation communication is a threat or statement of a plan to inflict bodily injury or commit a crime of violence.

(4) The mediation communication is intentionally used to plan, attempt to commit, or commit a crime or to conceal an ongoing crime or ongoing criminal activity.

(5) The mediation communication is sought or offered to prove or disprove a claim or complaint of professional misconduct or malpractice filed against a mediator.

(6) Except as otherwise provided below, the mediation communication is sought or offered to prove or disprove a claim or complaint of professional misconduct or malpractice filed against a mediation party, nonparty participant, or representative of a party based on conduct occurring during a mediation.

(7) Except as provided in R.C. 2317.02 and 3109.052<sup>1</sup>, the mediation communication is sought or offered to prove or disprove abuse, neglect, abandonment, or exploitation in a proceeding in which a child or adult protective services agency is a party, unless the case is referred by a court to mediation, and a public agency participates.

The bill also provides that there is no privilege under the UMA if a court, administrative agency, or arbitrator finds, after a hearing in camera, that the party seeking discovery or the proponent of the evidence has shown that the evidence is not otherwise available, that there is a need for the evidence that substantially outweighs the interest in protecting confidentiality, and that the mediation communication is sought or offered in either of the following (R.C. 2710.05(B)):

(1) A court proceeding involving a felony or misdemeanor;

(2) Except as otherwise provided below, a proceeding to prove a claim to rescind or reform or a defense to avoid liability on a contract arising out of the mediation.

However, a mediator may not be compelled to provide evidence of a mediation communication referred to in (6) above or the immediately prior paragraph (R.C. 2710.05(C)).

The bill states that if a mediation communication is not privileged under the specific exceptions set forth by the UMA, only the portion of the communication necessary for the application of the exception from nondisclosure may be admitted. Admission of evidence does not render the evidence, or any other mediation communication, discoverable or admissible for any other purpose. (R.C. 2710.05(D).)

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<sup>1</sup> R.C. 2317.02 specifies certain persons who are prohibited from testifying, and R.C. 3109.052 provides for the mediation of differences as to allocation of parental rights and responsibilities.

### **Prohibited mediator reports**

Mediators are prohibited by the bill from communicating information regarding mediations in prescribed circumstances. Except as provided below and in R.C. 3109.052, a mediator may not make a report, assessment, evaluation, recommendation, finding, or other communication regarding a mediation to a court, department, agency, or officer of this state or its political subdivisions that may make a ruling on the dispute that is the subject of the mediation. A communication made in violation of the provision will not be considered by a court, administrative agency, or arbitrator. (R.C. 2710.06(A) and (C).)

However, the bill does permit disclosure of particular facts. A mediator may disclose any of the following (R.C. 2710.06(B)):

- (1) Whether the mediation occurred or has terminated, whether a settlement was reached, and attendance;
- (2) A mediation communication as permitted by R.C. 2710.07;
- (3) A mediation communication evidencing abuse, neglect, abandonment, or exploitation of an individual to a public agency responsible for protecting individuals against abuse, neglect, abandonment, or exploitation.

### **Disclosure of conflicts of interest**

The bill requires mediators to make a reasonable inquiry before accepting a mediation to determine whether any conflict of interests arise and to disclose any conflicts to the mediation parties as soon as is practicable. Before accepting a mediation, an individual who is requested to serve as a mediator must do both of the following (R.C. 2710.08(A)):

- (1) Make an inquiry that is reasonable under the circumstances to determine whether there are any known facts that a reasonable individual would consider likely to affect the impartiality of the mediator, including a financial or personal interest in the outcome of the mediation and an existing or past relationship with a mediation party or foreseeable participant in the mediation;
- (2) Disclose any known fact described in (1) above to the mediation parties as soon as is practical before accepting a mediation.

If a mediator learns any fact described in paragraph (1) above after accepting a mediation, the mediator must disclose it to the mediation parties as soon as is practicable. At the request of a mediation party, an individual who is requested to serve as a mediator is required to disclose the mediator's qualifications to mediate a dispute. (R.C. 2710.08(B) and (C).)

The bill also provides that a person that fails to disclose any information as required above is precluded from asserting a privilege under the UMA. The provisions above do not apply when the mediation is conducted by a judge who might make a ruling on the case. The UMA does not require that a mediator have a special qualification by background or profession. (R.C. 2710.06(D), (E), and (F).)

### **Confidentiality; participation in mediation**

Except as provided in the Open Meetings Law and the Public Records Law, mediation communications are confidential to the extent agreed by the parties or provided by other sections of the Revised Code or rules adopted under any section of the Revised Code (R.C. 2710.07).

An attorney or other individual designated by a party may accompany the party to and participate in a mediation. A waiver of participation given before the mediation may be rescinded. (R.C. 2710.09.)

### **Relation to Electronic Signatures in Global and National Commerce Act**

The bill provides that the UMA may modify, limit, or supersede the federal Electronic Signatures in Global and National Commerce Act, 15 U.S.C. Section 7001 et seq. (E-Sign Act), but the UMA may not modify, limit, or supersede section 101(c) of that act or authorize electronic delivery of any of the notices described in section 103(b) of that act. The effect of this provision is to reaffirm state authority over matters of contract by making clear that state law is the controlling law if there is a conflict between the UMA and the federal E-sign Act, except for E-sign's consumer consent provisions found in section 101(c) and its notice provisions found in section 109(b), which have no substantive impact on the UMA. (R.C. 2710.10.)

### **Uniformity; severability clause**

In applying and construing the UMA, consideration must be given to the need to promote uniformity of the law with respect to its subject matter among other states that have enacted substantially similar laws. If any provision of this bill or its application to any person or circumstance is held invalid, the invalidity does not affect other provisions or applications of this bill that can be given effect without the invalid provision or application, and to this end the provisions of this act are severable. (Section 5 and Section 7.)

### **Definitions**

The bill contains the following definitions as used in the Uniform Mediation Act (R.C. 2710.01):

(1) "Mediation" means a process in which a mediator facilitates communication and negotiation between parties to assist them in reaching a voluntary agreement regarding their dispute.

(2) "Mediation communication" means a statement, whether oral, in a record, verbal or nonverbal, that occurs during a mediation or is made for purposes of considering, conducting, participating in, initiating, continuing, or reconvening a mediation or retaining a mediator.

(3) "Mediator" means an individual who conducts a mediation.

(4) "Nonparty participant" means a person, other than a party or mediator, that participates in a mediation.

(5) "Mediation party" means a person that participates in a mediation and whose agreement is necessary to resolve the dispute.

(6) "Person" means an individual, corporation, business trust, estate, trust, partnership, limited liability company, association, joint venture, agency or instrumentality of the state or of any political subdivision of the state, public corporation, or any other legal or commercial entity.

(7) "Proceeding" means either a judicial, administrative, arbitral, or other adjudicative process, including related pre-hearing and post-hearing motions, conferences, and discovery or a legislative hearing or similar process.

(8) "Record" means information that is inscribed on a tangible medium or that is stored in an electronic or other medium and is retrievable in perceivable form.

(9) "Sign" means either to execute or adopt a tangible symbol with the present intent to authenticate a record or to attach or logically associate an electronic symbol, sound, or process to or with a record with the present intent to authenticate a record.

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## HISTORY

ACTION	DATE	JOURNAL ENTRY
Introduced	10-16-03	p. 1134

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