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DETERMINING THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD: SUMMARY OF STATE LAWS

By: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Courts make a variety of decisions that affect children, including placement and custody determinations, safety and permanency planning, and proceedings for termination of parental rights. Whenever a court makes such a determination, it must weigh whether its decision will be in the "best interests" of the child.

All States, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands have statutes requiring that the child's best interests be considered whenever specified types of decisions are made regarding a child's custody, placement, or other critical life issues.

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