

H.203

AN ACT RELATING TO THE DISPOSITION OF PROPERTY UPON  
DEATH, TRANSFER OF INTEREST IN VEHICLE UPON DEATH AND  
HOMESTEAD EXEMPTION

It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

Sec. 1. REPEAL

Chapters 41, 43 and 45 of Title 14 are repealed.

Sec. 2. 14 V.S.A. chapter 42 is added to Part 2 to read:

CHAPTER 42. DESCENT AND SURVIVORS' RIGHTS

Subchapter 1. General Provisions

§ 301. INTESTATE ESTATE

(a) Any part of a decedent's estate not effectively disposed of by will passes by intestate succession to the decedent's heirs, except as modified by the decedent's will.

(b) A decedent's will may expressly exclude or limit the right of an individual or a class to inherit property. If such an individual or member of such a class survives the decedent, the share of the decedent's intestate estate which would have passed to that individual or member of such a class passes subject to any such limitation or exclusion set forth in the will.

(c) Nothing in this section shall preclude the surviving spouse of the decedent from making the election and receiving the benefits provided by section 319 of this title.

§ 302. DOWER AND CURTESY ABOLISHED

The estates of dower and curtesy are abolished.

§ 303. AFTERBORN HEIRS

For purposes of this chapter and chapter 1 of this title relating to wills, an individual in gestation at a particular time is treated as living at that time if the individual lives 120 hours or more after birth.

Subchapter 2. Survivors' Rights and Allowances

§ 311. SHARE OF SURVIVING SPOUSE

After payment of the debts, funeral charges, and expenses of administration, the intestate share of the decedent's surviving spouse is as follows.

(1) The entire intestate estate if no descendant of the decedent survives the decedent or if all of the decedent's surviving descendants are also descendants of the surviving spouse.

(2) In the event there shall survive the decedent one or more descendants of the decedent, who are not descendants of the surviving spouse and are not excluded by the decedent's will from inheriting from the decedent, the surviving spouse shall receive one-half of the intestate estate.

§ 312. SURVIVING SPOUSE TO RECEIVE HOUSEHOLD GOODS

Upon motion, the surviving spouse of a decedent may receive out of the decedent's estate all furnishings and furniture in the decedent's household when the decedent leaves no descendants who object. If any objection is made by any of the descendants, the court shall decide what, if any, of such personalty shall pass under this section. Goods and effects so assigned shall be in addition to the distributive share of the estate to which the surviving spouse is entitled under other provisions of law. In making a determination pursuant to this section, the court may consider the length of the decedent's marriage, the sentimental and monetary value of the property, and the source of the decedent's interest in the property.

§ 313. SURVIVING SPOUSE; VESSEL, SNOWMOBILE, OR

ALL-TERRAIN VEHICLE

Whenever the estate of a decedent who dies intestate consists principally of a vessel, snowmobile, or all-terrain vehicle, the surviving spouse shall be deemed to be the owner of the vessel, snowmobile, or all-terrain vehicle, and title to the vessel, snowmobile, or all-terrain vehicle shall automatically pass to the surviving spouse. The surviving spouse may register the vessel, snowmobile, or all-terrain vehicle pursuant to section 3816 of Title 23.

§ 314. SHARE OF HEIRS OTHER THAN SURVIVING SPOUSE

(a) The balance of the intestate estate not passing to the decedent's surviving spouse under section 311 of this title passes to the decedent's descendants by right of representation.

(b) If there is no taker under subsection (a) of this section, the intestate estate passes in the following order:

(1) to the decedent's parents equally if both survive or to the surviving parent;

(2) to the decedent's siblings or the descendants of any deceased siblings by right of representation;

(3) one-half of the intestate estate to the decedent's paternal grandparents equally if they both survive or to the surviving paternal grandparent and one-half of the intestate estate to the decedent's maternal grandparents equally if they both survive or to the surviving maternal grandparent and if decedent is survived by a grandparent, or grandparents on only one side, to that grandparent or those grandparents;

(4) in equal shares to the next of kin in equal degree.

(c) If property passes under this section by right of representation, the property shall be divided into as many equal shares as there are children or siblings of the decedent, as the case may be, who either survive the decedent or who predecease the decedent leaving surviving descendants.

§ 315. PARENT AND CHILD RELATIONSHIP

For the purpose of intestate succession, an individual is the child of his or her parents, regardless of their marital status, but a parent shall not inherit from a child unless the parent has openly acknowledged the child and not refused to support the child. The parent and child relationship may be established in parentage proceedings under subchapter 3A of chapter 5 of Title 15.

§ 316. SUPPORT OF SURVIVING SPOUSE AND FAMILY DURING  
SETTLEMENT

The probate court may make reasonable allowance for the expenses of maintenance of the surviving spouse and minor children or either, constituting the family of a decedent, out of the personal estate or the income of real or personal estate from date of death until settlement of the estate, but for no longer a period than until their shares in the estate are assigned to them or, in case of an insolvent estate, for not more than eight months after administration is granted. This allowance may take priority, in the discretion of the court, over debts of the estate.

§ 317. ALLOWANCE TO CHILDREN BEFORE PAYMENT OF DEBTS

When a person dies leaving children under 18 years of age, an allowance may be made for the necessary maintenance of such children until they become 18 years of age. Such allowance shall be made before any distribution of the estate among creditors, heirs, or beneficiaries by will.

§ 318. ALLOWANCE TO CHILDREN AFTER PAYMENT OF DEBTS

Before any partition or division of an estate among the heirs or beneficiaries by will, an allowance may be made for the necessary expenses of the support of the children of the decedent under 18 years of age until they arrive at that age. The probate court may order the executor or administrator to retain sufficient estate assets for that purpose, except where some provision is made by will for their support.

§ 319. WAIVER OF WILL BY SURVIVING SPOUSE

(a) A surviving spouse may waive the provisions of the decedent's will and in lieu thereof elect to take one-half of the balance of the estate, after the payment of claims and expenses.

(b) The surviving spouse must be living at the time this election is made. If the surviving spouse is mentally disabled and cannot make the election personally, a guardian or attorney in fact under a valid durable power of attorney may do so.

§ 320. EFFECT OF DIVORCE ORDER

A final divorce order from any state shall have the effect of nullifying a gift by will or inheritance by operation of law to an individual who was the decedent's spouse at the time the will was executed if the decedent was no longer married to that individual at the time of death, unless his or her will specifically states to the contrary

§ 321. CONVEYANCES TO DEFEAT SPOUSE'S INTEREST

A voluntary transfer of any property by an individual during marriage, made without adequate consideration and for the primary purpose of defeating a surviving spouse in a claim to a share of the decedent's property so transferred, shall be void and inoperative to bar the claim. The decedent shall be deemed at the time of his or her death to be the owner and seised of an interest in such property sufficient for the purpose of assigning and setting out the surviving spouse's share.

§ 322. UNLAWFUL KILLING AFFECTING INHERITANCE

Notwithstanding sections 311 through 314 of this title or provisions otherwise made, in any case where an individual is entitled to inherit or receive property under the last will of a decedent, or otherwise, such individual's share in the decedent's estate shall be forfeited and shall pass to the remaining heirs or beneficiaries of the decedent if such person intentionally and unlawfully kills the decedent. In any proceedings to contest the right of an individual to inherit or receive property under a will, the record of such person's conviction of intentionally and unlawfully killing the decedent shall be admissible evidence that such person did intentionally kill the decedent.

Subchapter 3. Descent, Omitted Issue, and Lapsed Legacies

§ 331. DEGREES; HOW COMPUTED: KINDRED OF HALF-BLOOD

Kindred of the half-blood shall inherit the same share they would inherit if they were of the whole blood.

§ 332. SHARE OF AFTER-BORN CHILD

When a child of a testator is born after the making of a will and provision is not therein made for that child, he or she shall have the same share in the estate of the testator as if the testator had died intestate unless it is apparent from the will that it was the intention of the testator that provision should not be made for the child.

§ 333. SHARE OF CHILD OR DESCENDANT OF CHILD OMITTED  
FROM WILL

When a testator omits to provide in his or her will for any of his or her children, or for the descendants of a deceased child, and it appears that the omission was made by mistake or accident, the child or descendants, as the case may be, shall have and be assigned the same share of the estate of the testator as if the testator had died intestate.

§ 334. AFTER-BORN AND OMITTED CHILD; FROM WHAT PART  
OF ESTATE SHARE TAKEN

When a share of a testator's estate is assigned to a child born after the making of a will, or to a child or the descendant of a child omitted in the will, the share shall be taken first from the estate not disposed of by the will, if there is any. If

that is not sufficient, so much as is necessary shall be taken from the devisees or legatees in proportion to the value of the estate they respectively receive under the will. If the obvious intention of the testator, as to some specific devise, legacy, or other provision in the will, would thereby be defeated, the specific devise, legacy, or provision may be exempted from such apportionment and a different apportionment adopted in the discretion of the court.

§ 335. BENEFICIARY DYING BEFORE TESTATOR: DESCENDANTS  
TO TAKE

When a testamentary gift is made to a child or other kindred of the testator, and the designated beneficiary dies before the testator, leaving one or more descendants who survive the testator, such descendants shall take the gift that the designated beneficiary would have taken if he or she had survived the testator, unless a different disposition is required by the will.

§ 336. INDIVIDUAL ABSENT AND UNHEARD OF; SHARE OF ESTATE

If an individual entitled to a distributive share of the estate of a decedent is absent and unheard of for six years, two of which are after the death of the decedent, the probate court in which the decedent's estate is pending may order the share of the absent individual distributed in accordance with the terms of the decedent's will or the laws of intestacy as if such absent individual had not survived the decedent. If the absent individual proves to be alive, he or she shall be entitled to the share of the estate notwithstanding prior distribution, and may recover in an action on this statute any portion thereof which any other

individual received under order. Before an order is made for the payment of distribution of any money or estate as authorized in this section, notice shall be given as provided by the Vermont Rules of Probate Procedure.

§ 337. REQUIREMENT THAT INDIVIDUAL SURVIVE DECEDENT FOR  
120 HOURS

Except as provided in the decedent's will, an individual who fails to survive the decedent by 120 hours is deemed to have predeceased the decedent for purposes of homestead allowance, exempt property, intestate succession, and taking under decedent's will, and the decedent's heirs and beneficiaries shall be determined accordingly. If it is not established by clear and convincing evidence that an individual who would otherwise be an heir or beneficiary survived the decedent by 120 hours, it is deemed that the individual failed to survive for the required period. This section is not to be applied if its application would result in escheat.

§ 338. DISTRIBUTION; ORDER IN WHICH ASSETS APPROPRIATED;  
ABATEMENT

(a)(1) Except as provided in subsection (b) of this section, shares of distributes given under a will abate, without any preference or priority as between real and personal property in the following order:

(A) property not disposed of by the will;

(B) residuary devises and bequests;

(C) general devises and bequests;

(D) specific devises and bequests.

(2) For purpose of abatement, a general devise or bequest charged on any specific property or fund is a specific devise or bequest to the extent of the value of the property on which it is charged, and upon the failure or insufficiency of the property on which it is charged, a general devise or bequest to the extent of the failure or insufficiency. Abatement within each classification is in proportion to the amounts of property each of the beneficiaries would have received if full distribution of the property had been made in accordance with the terms of the will.

(b) If the will expresses an order of abatement or if the testamentary plan or the express or implied purpose of a devise or bequest would be defeated by the order of abatement listed in subsection (a) of this section, the shares of the distributees shall abate as may be necessary to give effect to the intention of the testator.

(c) If the subject of a preferred devise or bequest is sold or used incident to administration, abatement shall be achieved by appropriate adjustments in, or contribution from, other interests in the remaining assets.

Sec. 3. 23 V.S.A. § 2023 is amended to read:

§ 2023. TRANSFER OF INTEREST IN VEHICLE

(a) If an owner transfers his or her interest in a vehicle, other than by the creation of a security interest, he or she shall, at the time of delivery of the vehicle, execute an assignment and warranty of title to the transferee in the space

provided therefor on the certificate or as the commissioner prescribes, and of the odometer reading or hubometer reading or clock meter reading of the vehicle at the time of delivery in the space provided therefor on the certificate, and cause the certificate and assignment to be mailed or delivered to the transferee or to the commissioner. Where title to a vehicle is in the name of more than one person, the nature of the ownership must be indicated by one of the following on the certificate of title:

- (1) TEN ENT (tenants by the entirety);
- (2) JTEN (joint tenants);
- (3) TEN COM (tenants in common); ~~or~~
- (4) PTNRS (partners); or
- (5) TOD (transfer on death).

(b) Upon request of the owner or transferee, a lienholder in possession of the certificate of title shall, unless the transfer was a breach of his or her security agreement, either deliver the certificate to the transferee for delivery to the commissioner or, upon receipt from the transferee of the owner's assignment, the transferee's application for a new certificate and the required fee, mail or deliver them to the commissioner. The delivery of the certificate does not affect the rights of the lienholder under his security agreement.

(c) If a security interest is reserved or created at the time of the transfer, the certificate of title shall be retained by or delivered to the person who becomes

the lienholder, and the parties shall comply with the provisions of section 2043 of this title.

(d) Except as provided in section 2024 of this title and as between the parties, a transfer by an owner is not effective until the provisions of this section and section 2026 of this title have been complied with; however, an owner who has delivered possession of the vehicle to the transferee and has complied with the provisions of this section and section 2026 of this title requiring action by him or her is not liable as owner for any damages thereafter resulting from operation of the vehicle.

(e) Notwithstanding other provisions of the law, whenever the estate of an individual who dies intestate consists principally of an automobile, the surviving spouse shall be deemed to be the owner of the motor vehicle and title to the same shall automatically and by virtue hereof pass to said surviving spouse. Registration of the vehicle in the name of the surviving spouse shall be effected by payment of a transfer fee of \$7.00. This transaction is exempt from the provisions of the purchase and use tax on motor vehicles.

(1) Notwithstanding other provisions of the law, and except as provided in subdivision (2) of this subsection, whenever the estate of an individual consists in whole or in part of a motor vehicle, and the person's will or other testamentary document does not specifically address disposition of motor vehicles, the surviving spouse shall be deemed to be the owner of the motor vehicle and title to the motor vehicle shall automatically pass to the surviving

spouse. Registration and title of the motor vehicle in the name of the surviving spouse shall be effected by payment of a transfer fee of \$7.00. This transaction is exempt from the provisions of the purchase and use tax on motor vehicles.

(2) This subsection shall apply to no more than two motor vehicles, and shall not apply if the motor vehicle is titled in the name of one or more persons other than the decedent and the surviving spouse.

(f) Where the title identifies a person who will become the owner upon the death of the principal owner (transfer on death), the principal owner shall have all rights of ownership and rights of transfer until his or her death. The designated transferee shall have no rights of ownership until such time as the principal owner has died as established by a valid death certificate. At that time, the transferee shall become the owner of the vehicle subject to any existing security interests.

Sec. 4. 27 V.S.A. §§ 101 and 102 are amended to read:

§ 101. DEFINITION; EXEMPTION FROM ATTACHMENT AND  
EXECUTION

The homestead of a natural person consisting of a dwelling house, outbuildings and the land used in connection therewith, not exceeding ~~\$75,000.00~~ \$125,000.00 in value, and owned and used or kept by such person as a homestead together with the rents, issues, profits, and products thereof, shall be exempt from attachment and execution except as hereinafter provided.

§ 102. DESIGNATING HOMESTEAD IN CASE OF LEVY

When an execution is levied upon real estate of the person of which a homestead is a part or upon that part of a homestead in excess of the limitation of ~~\$75,000.00~~ \$125,000.00 in value, that person may designate and choose the part thereof, not exceeding the limited value, to which the exemption created in section 101 of this title shall apply. Upon designation and choice or refusal to designate or choose, the officer levying the execution, if the parties fail to agree upon appraisers, shall appoint three disinterested freeholders of the vicinity who shall be sworn by him or her and who shall fix the location and boundaries of the homestead to the amount of ~~\$75,000.00~~ \$125,000.00 in value. The officer shall then proceed with the sale of the residue of the real estate on the execution as in other cases, and the doings in respect to the homestead shall be stated in the return upon the execution.

Sec. 5. EFFECTIVE DATE

Sec. 2 of this act shall only apply to the estates of persons dying after January 1, 2009.