

SUPREME JUDICIAL COURT OF MAINE

Carson Waterman v. Grady Wheeler

Waterman, 2025 ME 96 (Supreme Judicial Court of Maine 2025) · No. Yor-25-174 · Decided December 4, 2025

SUMMARY

The Maine Supreme Judicial Court held that when parents provide substantially equal care, neither parent is the primary care provider for purposes of 19-A M.R.S. § 2006(5)(A). Accordingly, a parent who is legally obligated to support another child is entitled to a child-support adjustment, and the court vacated the support order and remanded for recalculation.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Judicial Court of Maine
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Mead, J.; Connors, J.; Lawrence, J.; Douglas, J.; Lipez, J.
JURISDICTION	Maine Supreme Judicial Court
DECIDED	December 4, 2025
DOCKET	Yor-25-174
DISPOSITION	vacated
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Grady Wheeler appealed from a District Court order requiring him to pay child support to Carson Waterman. The Supreme Judicial Court reviewed the trial court's interpretation of 19-A M.R.S. § 2006(5)(A).
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Child-support awards are ordinarily reviewed for abuse of discretion, but questions of statutory interpretation are reviewed de novo.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published opinion
PARTIES	Grady Wheeler v. Carson Waterman

TOPICS

- child support
- family law procedure
- statutory interpretation
- appellate procedure
- standard of review

PRACTICE AREAS

- family law
- child support
- statutory interpretation
- appellate procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether a parent who provides substantially equal care with the other parent may obtain the child-support adjustment under 19-A M.R.S. § 2006(5)(A) for a legal obligation to support another child in that parent's household.

HOLDINGS

1. When parents provide substantially equal care, neither parent is the primary care provider for purposes of 19-A M.R.S. § 2006(5)(A). Accordingly, either parent may qualify as a parent who is not the primary care provider and may receive the statutory adjustment if legally obligated to support another child.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Following this logic, we conclude that when parents provide substantially equal care, neither of them is “the primary care provider” that section 2006(5)(A) references.” (¶ 6)

“Because the parties provide for their child equally, Wheeler cannot be the child’s primary care provider. Instead, he is a “parent who is not the primary care provider” and is entitled to an adjustment of his child support obligation in accordance with section 2006(5)(A).” (¶ 7)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Waterman and Wheeler are the parents of a ten-year-old daughter whose care they provide substantially equally. While their competing motions to modify the parental-rights-and-responsibilities order were pending, Wheeler's son was born; that son was not the subject of the child-support order. The District Court ordered Wheeler to pay support for the daughter but refused to adjust the amount based on Wheeler's legal obligation to support his son.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The parties obtained a parental-rights-and-responsibilities judgment in 2016, and an amended order in 2020 reduced Wheeler's child-support obligation to zero while providing that the child resided equally with both parents. After the parties filed opposing motions to modify in December 2023, the District Court ordered Wheeler to pay child support but denied his request for an adjustment based on the birth of another son. The court denied Wheeler's Rule 59 motion to alter or amend, and Wheeler timely appealed.

DISPOSITION

vacated

REMAND INSTRUCTIONS

Vacate the child-support order and remand for recalculation of child support pursuant to 19-A M.R.S. § 2006(5)(A), consistent with the opinion.

CASES CITED

- McCarthy v. Guber, 2023 ME 53, ¶ 10, 300 A.3d 804
- Johnson v. Smith, 1999 ME 168, ¶ 6, 740 A.2d 579

- Cent. Me. Power Co. v. Chevereux Marine, Inc., 2013 ME 37, ¶ 8, 68 A.3d 1262
- Sutherland v. Morrill, 2008 ME 6, ¶ 6, 940 A.2d 192

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