

NOTICE

Decision filed 09/22/26. The text of this decision may be changed or corrected prior to the filing of a Petition for Rehearing or the disposition of the same.

2026 IL App (5th) 260482-U

NO. 5-26-0482

IN THE

APPELLATE COURT OF ILLINOIS

FIFTH DISTRICT

NOTICE

This order was filed under Supreme Court Rule 23 and is not precedent except in the limited circumstances allowed under Rule 23(e)(1).

MICAH GORDON,	)	Appeal from the
	)	Circuit Court of
Petitioner-Appellee,	)	St. Clair County.
	)	
v.	)	No. 24-FA-203
	)	
FATIMAH NICKERSON,	)	Honorable
	)	Alana I. Mejias,
Respondent-Appellant.	)	Judge, presiding.

JUSTICE SHOLAR delivered the judgment of the court.
Justices Boie and Clarke concurred in the judgment.

ORDER

¶ 1 *Held:* The circuit court did not err in either awarding the petitioner a multi-family child support reduction and tax exemption or ordering equal parenting time where the record shows the court balanced all relevant statutory factors and rendered a decision in accordance with the best interests of the minor. Additionally, the court properly denied the respondent's contempt petitions and refused to review police body camera footage that was not authenticated. The judgment of the circuit court is affirmed.

¶ 2 Respondent, Fatimah Nickerson (Mother), appeals *pro se* from the May 8, 2026, order of the St. Clair County circuit court entering a final parenting plan regarding the parties' minor child, which granted her and petitioner, Micah Gordon (Father), equal parenting time.¹ For the following reasons, we affirm the judgment of the circuit court.

¹Mother was represented by counsel at times below. Father is also representing himself *pro se* in this appeal, as he did for most of the proceedings.

¶ 3

I. BACKGROUND

¶ 4 On May 8, 2024, Father filed a petition for allocation of parental responsibilities of the minor, Ashira G., born on April 7, 2024. In his petition, Father identified himself and Mother as the minor's biological parents. Additionally, Father requested that he be awarded joint decision-making authority and equal parenting time with the minor.

¶ 5 On June 25, 2024, the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services (IDHFS) successfully petitioned the circuit court to intervene in the case, asserting that it had been providing child support services pursuant to Title IV-D of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. § 651 *et seq.* (2018)) and the Illinois Public Aid Code (305 ILCS 5/10-1 *et seq.* (West 2022)). The same day, IDHFS filed a complaint for support, stating that Father was obligated for the financial and medical support of the minor and asked the circuit court to order him to pay child support for her. On August 20, 2024, the circuit court entered a mediation order, requiring the parties to participate in mediation regarding the issues of custody, guardianship, and/or visitation of the minor. According to a mediator report filed on September 20, 2024, the parties reached a partial agreement concerning the allocation of parental responsibilities and parenting time.

¶ 6 On February 21, 2025, the circuit court entered a temporary order regarding parenting time and other matters. In its order, the court stated that Father had left "prior to [the court's] ruling," and that Mother "shall have all other parenting time." While it is not entirely clear what "all other parenting time" meant, as most of the court's order had been crossed out, a transcript from the hearing that day indicated that Mother was granted "all parenting time." The court explained that Father had "left prior to ruling," and therefore, he was "obviously *** not interested in exercising parenting time." We note, however, that the transcript from that hearing was not properly included in the record on appeal, as will be discussed below.

¶ 7 Additionally, the circuit court’s February 21, 2025, order stated that the parties had to follow all recommendations from the minor’s pediatrician and that they had to communicate “regarding the minor child through AppClose app effective today.” The order further stated that Father had to pay child support to Mother in the amount of \$835 per month, in addition to insurance for the minor in the amount of \$66.34 per month. The court reserved the issue of retroactive support and continued the matter. Meanwhile, Father wrote a letter to the circuit court judge, apologizing for “walking out of the courtroom” on February 21, 2025, and for his “language” on February 5, 2025. Father claimed that at the time, he “was overwhelmed with emotion,” but he acknowledged that his actions were “inappropriate” and “show[ed] a lack of respect for the court.”

¶ 8 On May 29, 2025, Father filed a motion to modify parenting time, stating that he had lost all of his parenting time as a result of him walking out of the courtroom on February 21, 2025. Father alleged that he had walked out “[a]fter a very emotional court session.” According to Father, prior to that court hearing, Mother had violated the mediation order as it related to visitation, parenting time, and custody. Father claimed that he had been asking Mother to see the minor, but she had denied his requests. The same day, Father filed a motion for substitution of judge “due to continuous bias and impartial treatment.” For example, Father alleged that the circuit court judge considered Mother’s other children for purposes of the multi-family adjustment, but the court had failed to consider his other two children in determining his child support obligation for the minor in this case. Father also argued that the judge repeatedly denied him parenting time, even though that was not in the minor’s best interests.

¶ 9 On June 3, 2025, Father filed an emergency motion for substitution of judge, setting forth essentially the same allegations as his prior substitution motion. The same day, Father filed an emergency motion to modify parenting time, again alleging that Mother had violated the mediation

order and was refusing to let him visit with the minor. On June 4, 2025, the circuit court denied both of Father's motions for substitution of judge, finding that it had already ruled on substantive issues and that Father had not met the threshold statutory requirements to substitute for cause. As to his emergency motion to modify parenting time, the court stated that it did not "necessitate an expedited setting pursuant to local statute or supreme court rule."

¶ 10 On August 19, 2025, Mother filed a motion for sanctions against Father, asserting that he had failed to comply with discovery requests by not providing financial documents or answers to Mother's custody interrogatories. Mother asked the circuit court to sanction Father, order him to answer her custody interrogatories, and to award her reasonable attorney fees incurred in bringing the motion. The court continued the matter to August 27, 2025.

¶ 11 On August 27, 2025, the circuit court entered a parenting time order. At the outset, the court's order indicated that a hearing was held on August 21, 2025. Specifically, the court's order stated, "This cause came before the Court on August 21, 2025, on all remaining issues." The court noted that Father appeared at that hearing *pro se*, while Mother appeared with counsel. However, Mother has not included a transcript or report of proceedings from that hearing, as will be discussed in our analysis below.

¶ 12 The circuit court's August 27, 2025, parenting time order then analyzed the relevant best-interest factors. In doing so, the court first noted that the evidence presented by the parties regarding the allocation of parental responsibilities was minimal. Regarding the child's wishes, the court noted that the minor was only 16 months old at that time. As to the child's adjustment to her home, school, and community, the court noted that the minor had primarily lived with Mother since birth, but that Father had exercised overnight parenting time. Additionally, the minor's

maternal grandmother, Theresa Johnson, provided childcare for the minor. The court had no concern about the physical or mental health of either party.

¶ 13 Regarding the parties' ability to cooperate to make decisions, the court noted that Mother and Father had separated before the minor's birth. Mother had been responsible for scheduling and taking the minor to doctors' appointments, and Johnson had also taken the minor to appointments on two to three occasions. The parties were previously ordered to communicate through a parenting app, and they shared information concerning the minor's medical care without issue. The court further noted there was no prior agreement or course of conduct between the parties related to decision-making with respect to the minor. Mother wanted sole decision-making authority over the minor, while Father wanted them to share joint decision-making authority over her. According to Mother, the parties got along until the litigation began in this case. She wanted them to get along again, and she wanted Father to attend the minor's doctors' appointments. The court noted that the minor needed a safe, supportive environment and the involvement of both parents.

¶ 14 The court also noted the parties lived about 40 minutes away from one another, and that they both had access to a vehicle. Father requested that his sister, Camilla Gordon, and/or his girlfriend, Jessica Aders-Watson, be authorized as transportation providers for the minor. The court found there was no evidence presented that would support a restriction on decision-making for minor. Regarding the willingness of each parent to facilitate and encourage a close and continuing relationship between the other parent and the minor, the court found that, based on text messages presented as exhibits, "the parties were able to communicate and establish a consistent parenting time schedule prior to litigation." The court further found there was no evidence presented of physical violence or a threat of physical violence by either parent directed against the

minor. However, Mother testified that she had been a victim of abuse by Father, and that is the reason she ended their relationship. The court noted that neither party was a sex offender.

¶ 15 Finally, the court found that both parties had engaged in “petty behavior throughout these proceedings.” Specifically, the court noted that Father had outbursts “in all but the final court appearance,” including the time he left the February 21, 2025, temporary hearing “when he was unhappy with this Court’s ruling.” Mother, on the other hand, had used the court’s temporary order “as a tool to prohibit [Father’s] parenting time for six months.” The court further found that Mother’s “testimony during the hearing on temporary issues was not supported by the evidence and text messages presented by [Father] during the trial.”

¶ 16 After reviewing all the relevant factors, the circuit court found, as relevant here, that it was in the minor’s best interest for Mother to be the primary parent for residential purposes and for both parents to have parenting time pursuant to the accompanying parenting plan, which provided the following: (1) both parents would share joint decision-making authority over the minor with respect to education, healthcare, extracurricular activities, and religion; (2) Father would have parenting time with the minor from Thursday evening to Sunday evening every other week; (3) if a Monday holiday followed Father’s weekend parenting time, then his parenting time would be extended through the evening that Monday; (4) Father would also have parenting time with the minor from Thursday evening to Friday evening on the weeks that he did not have her over the weekend; (5) all other parenting time was designated to Mother; and (6) the parties would have parenting time with the minor on alternating holidays every year as set forth in the parenting plan. The plan further provided that the parties would exchange the minor at the Children’s First Foundation/Visitation Exchange Center, located in Belleville, Illinois, and that the minor’s maternal grandmother, Theresa Johnson, and paternal aunt, Camilla Gordon, were authorized

transportation providers. If the Children's First Foundation was not open on an exchange day, then the parties would exchange the minor at the Mascoutah Police Department.

¶ 17 The circuit court considered multi-family adjustments for the parties' other children, including Father's two other children, who were not previously considered in determining child support. The court then reduced Father's child support payment to Mother to \$435.31 per month, in addition to \$61.28 per month for the minor's health insurance. The court further ordered the parties to alternate claiming the minor for tax purposes each year.

¶ 18 On October 24, 2025, Father filed an emergency motion for contempt against Mother for her alleged failure to obey the circuit court's August 27, 2025, order. In his motion, Father alleged that Mother had never provided him with a copy of the minor's insurance policy. Additionally, he alleged that Mother did not bring the minor to the Children's First Foundation on October 23, 2025, causing him to miss his parenting time from October 23 to October 26, 2025. Father further alleged that on September 4, 2025, Mother received a ticket from the Belleville Police Department for unlawful visitation interference. According to Father, Mother had also received numerous violations at the Children's First Foundation. On September 14, 2025, Mother was "roughly mishandling" the minor on camera at the Mascoutah Police Station. Finally, Father alleged that Mother had been using the court-appointed app to "harass and send hateful verbiage" to him. Father asked the court to order Mother to provide him with a copy of the minor's insurance information, restrict her harassment on the court-appointment app and limit the parties' communication therein to matters directly concerning the minor, and grant him full custody or at least 50% of the parenting time over the minor.

¶ 19 On December 12, 2025, Mother filed a response to Father's emergency motion for contempt. In the response, Mother alleged, *inter alia*, that the minor had health insurance through

a state-sponsored program, known as “AllKids/Medicaid,” which did “not issue a traditional ‘policy’ document.” According to Mother, Father knew this, and was “deliberately demanding a document that [did] not exist to manufacture a violation.” Mother also disputed Father’s claims that she had received violations from the Children’s First Foundation, and that she was “roughly mishandling” the minor. Mother further alleged that Father was, in fact, the one engaging in “abusive communication and litigation tactics,” and that all her communications with him had been “directly related to the minor child’s needs.” Mother alleged that Father’s contempt motion was “the latest example of his contemptuous behavior,” which was detrimental to the minor’s wellbeing. Finally, Mother claimed that Father had been engaging in deception. For example, at the time of the minor’s birth, Father claimed he was “stranded at work,” when he was actually with Jessica Aders-Watson. Accordingly, Mother asked the circuit court to deny Father’s contempt petition, including his “baseless request for *** 50/50 parenting time,” and to find Father in contempt instead.

¶ 20 Meanwhile, multiple other pleadings were filed by the parties. However, as most of the information contained in those pleadings was either irrelevant to the issues on appeal or addressed in the circuit court’s final judgment discussed below, we need not recite them all here.

¶ 21 On April 9, 2026, Mother filed an emergency motion to compel return and rule for contempt, alleging, in the main, that Father had relocated to Evansville, Indiana, without notice, and that he had intentionally misled her and police regarding the minor’s location. Additionally, Father was violating the court’s order by using his girlfriend, Jessica Aders-Watson, to transport the minor. Mother, therefore, asked the circuit court to hold Father in contempt for “willful violations,” and to restrict his parenting time. The next day, Mother filed a petition for rule to show cause, alleging, *inter alia*, that Father had violated the circuit court’s order by failing to use the

court-ordered exchange facility for the minor, and by relocating the minor to Evansville, Indiana, without notice. Moreover, Father “willfully withheld” some of the minor’s personal belongings and took down her hair style, causing the minor emotional distress. Mother asked the circuit court to, among other things, issue a rule to show cause as to why Father should not be held in indirect civil contempt of court, order the immediate return of the minor to Illinois, and order the return of the minor’s personal belongings. On April 22, 2026, Mother filed another emergency motion to compel return and rule for contempt, essentially setting forth the same allegations as her earlier emergency motion.

¶ 22 On April 29, 2026, the circuit court held a hearing on the parties’ motions for contempt. The parties testified concerning their respective motions. Much of their testimony was irrelevant to the contempt motions, and instead, related to each other’s alleged mistreatment of the minor and/or use of the minor’s personal belongings. Following the parties’ respective testimony, the circuit court took the matter under advisement. The court, however, did order Mother to provide Father with an updated copy of the minor’s insurance card within seven days of her receiving it.

¶ 23 On May 8, 2026, the circuit court entered a final parenting time order. In its order, the court found that Father had missed his parenting time with the minor from October 23 to 26, 2025, when Mother brought the minor to the Mascoutah Police Department, instead of the Children’s First Foundation, for the exchange. Additionally, there were documented violations for both parents, as well as Father’s alternate pick-up person, on the Children’s First Foundation’s reporting forms. Some of the violations stemmed from confusion over exchange times. Most of Father’s alternate pick-up person violations were for late arrivals, while many of Mother’s violations were for “inappropriate interactions and behavior with staff at the Children’s First Foundation.” The court’s order further noted that each of Mother’s petitions for rule to show cause and/or contempt alleged

that Father had engaged in actions that “she may find obnoxious,” but “are not prohibited by Court order.” Specifically, the court noted that Father was not prohibited from taking the minor to Evansville, Indiana, during his parenting time; Father’s girlfriend, Jessica Aders-Watson, was not prohibited from providing transportation for the minor during Father’s parenting time; the parties were not required to exchange the minor’s clothes or personal belongings during exchanges; and the parties were not restricted from styling the minor’s hair during their respective parenting time. However, if the parties were not exercising their parenting time at the address provided on the amended parenting plan, “they shall notify the other parent, via the coparenting app, where they will be exercising their parenting time.”

¶ 24 In its order, the circuit court also granted Father’s October 24, 2025, emergency motion for contempt. The court noted that it was entering a contemporaneous amended parenting plan, which will be discussed below, to reduce the number of exchanges between the parties. The court then denied Mother’s April 9 and 22, 2026, emergency motions to compel return and rule for contempt, as well as her April 10, 2026, petition for rule to show cause. In doing so, the court noted that Mother failed to show that Father had willfully or contemptuously violated the court’s orders.

¶ 25 The accompanying amended parenting plan provided, as relevant here, that Mother would remain the primary parent for residential purposes. The parties would continue to share joint decision-making authority over the minor with respect to education, healthcare, extracurricular activities, and religion. Additionally, the parties would have equal parenting time with the minor, alternating each week. The remainder of the parenting plan was consistent with the court’s August 27, 2025, parenting time order.

¶ 26 Mother filed a timely notice of appeal from the circuit court’s May 8, 2026, order. Her appeal was expedited pursuant to Illinois Supreme Court Rule 311(a) (eff. July 1, 2018).

¶ 27

II. ANALYSIS

¶ 28 On appeal, Mother contends that the circuit court improperly (1) awarded Father a multi-family child support reduction and tax exemption; (2) awarded Father equal parenting time, notwithstanding his prior volatile conduct, rule violations, and disruption of the primary caretaker bond; (3) denied her contempt petitions; and (4) refused to review relevant police body camera footage.

¶ 29 Initially, we note that Mother has not included transcripts or a report of proceedings from most of the hearings below, or an appropriate alternative under Illinois Supreme Court Rule 323(c) and (d) (eff. July 1, 2017), such as a bystander's report or an agreed statement of facts. Likewise, Mother has included only part of a transcript from the February 21, 2025, hearing, and has written her own notes on the transcript. This violates Illinois Supreme Court Rule 323, which states that the report of proceedings must be certified and "include all the evidence pertinent to the issues on appeal." Ill. S. Ct. R. 323(a), (b) (eff. July 1, 2017). As the appellant, Mother bears the burden of presenting a sufficiently complete record of the proceedings below to support her claims of error, and any doubts arising from the record's inadequacies will be resolved against her. *Foutch v. O'Bryant*, 99 Ill. 2d 389, 391-92 (1984). Without a complete record, we must presume that the circuit court acted in conformity with the law and had a sufficient factual basis for its ruling. *Id.* at 392.

¶ 30 Moreover, the parties agree that we have jurisdiction to review the circuit court's May 8, 2026, amended parenting time order, but they disagree over whether we have jurisdiction to review the court's August 27, 2025, parenting time order. Mother identified both of those orders in her notice of appeal. Father argues that since Mother's notice of appeal was filed more than 30 days after the August 27, 2025, order was entered, we cannot consider it. We disagree and find that the

May 8, 2026, order relates directly back to the August 27, 2025, order. In other words, by its very nature, the May 8, 2026, order followed the earlier August 27, 2025, order that it amended. Therefore, the August 27, 2025, order was a step in the procedural progression leading to the May 8, 2026, judgment, and we may review it. See *Knapp v. Bulun*, 392 Ill. App. 3d 1018, 1023 (2009) (noting that an appeal from a final judgment draws into issue all previous interlocutory orders that produced the final judgment and we may review those orders that constitute a procedural step in the progression leading to the final judgment from which the appeal was taken).

¶ 31 We now turn to Mother’s contention that Father was not entitled to a child support reduction or tax exemption based on a multi-family adjustment. It is within the broad discretion of the circuit court to determine the modification of child support, and we will not overturn its decision absent an abuse of discretion. *Roper v. Johns*, 345 Ill. App. 3d 1127, 1130 (2004). An abuse of discretion occurs when the lower court’s ruling is arbitrary, fanciful, or unreasonable, or when its ruling rests on an error of law. *In re Parentage of I.I.*, 2016 IL App (1st) 160071, ¶ 52.

¶ 32 “A child support judgment can generally be modified only upon a showing of a substantial change in circumstances.” *Id.* ¶ 53. Additionally, the party seeking modification must show a change in both the child’s needs and the noncustodial parent’s ability to pay. *Id.* Relevant here, section 505(a)(3)(F) of the Illinois Marriage and Dissolution of Marriage Act (Marriage Act) (750 ILCS 5/505(a)(3)(F) (West 2024)), governing adjustments to income, provides for a multi-family adjustment. That section states:

“(I) Multi-family adjustment. If a parent is also legally responsible for support of a child not shared with the other parent and not subject to the present proceeding, there shall be an adjustment to net income as follows:

(i) Multi-family adjustment with court order. The court shall deduct from the parent’s net income the amount of child support actually paid by the parent

pursuant to a support order unless the court makes a finding that it would cause economic hardship to the child.

(ii) Multi-family adjustment without court order. Upon the request or application of a parent actually supporting a presumed, acknowledged, or adjudicated child living in or outside of that parent's household, there shall be an adjustment to child support. The court shall deduct from the parent's net income the amount of financial support actually paid by the parent for the child or 75% of the support the parent should pay under the child support guidelines (before this adjustment), whichever is less, unless the court makes a finding that it would cause economic hardship to the child. The adjustment shall be calculated using that parent's income alone." *Id.* § 505(a)(3)(F)(I)(i), (ii).

¶ 33 In this case, as set forth, the circuit court entered an order on August 27, 2025, wherein it reduced Father's prior temporary child support obligation. The court reduced his support obligation from \$835 to \$435.31 per month based on a multi-family adjustment. The court reduced his insurance obligation from \$66.34 to \$61.28 per month. Specifically, the court's order stated,

"(4) On February 12, 2025, [Father] was ordered to pay \$835.00/month as temporary child support. This figure was calculated based on [Father] and [Mother] having a gross monthly income of \$5080.44 and \$1981.00, respectively. The Court's temporary calculations adjusted for [Mother's] two additional children but did not adjust for [Father's] two additional children as no evidence was presented of same.

(5) After considering the adjustment for the parties' additional children and their respective incomes, [Father's] child support obligation is \$435.31/month and his contribution towards health insurance is \$61.28/month."

In a separate order for support entered the same day, the circuit court indicated that Father's multi-family adjustment was without court order and deducted \$1,020.75 per month, the amount it determined he should pay for his two other children, from his net income of \$3,967. Father's adjusted net income was therefore \$2,946.25, and the court determined his new child support payment based off that amount.

¶ 34 Mother claims, without citing any relevant authority, that the lower court impermissibly reduced Father’s child support obligation because he failed to present any evidence of his support obligations for his other two children. However, this was not required under the aforementioned statute. The court was permitted to deduct from Father’s net income 75% of the support he should pay under the child support guidelines. See *id.* § 505(a)(3)(F)(I)(ii). While we acknowledge Mother’s claim that she will suffer “severe economic hardship” as a result of the reduction, this does not establish that the court’s modification of Father’s child support obligation was arbitrary, fanciful, or unreasonable, or that it rested on an error of law. Moreover, Mother has not provided us with a sufficient record of the August 27, 2025, hearing to ascertain how the court calculated Father’s reduction in child support, much less find that the court’s reduction constituted an abuse of discretion.

¶ 35 We likewise reject Mother’s contention that the circuit court improperly awarded Father a tax exemption, allowing him to claim the minor for tax purposes every other year, beginning in 2027. Mother has not cited any authority or developed any legal argument to support this claim, in violation of Illinois Supreme Court Rule 341(h)(7) (eff. Oct. 1, 2020). It is well-settled that this court is not a repository in which an appellant may foist the burden of argument and research; it is neither our function nor obligation to act as an advocate for the appellant or search the record for error. *Melamed v. Melamed*, 2016 IL App (1st) 141453, ¶ 21. While we recognize that an appellant appealing *pro se* is not a licensed attorney educated in the practice of law, she must, nonetheless, comply with the established rules of procedure. *Lill Coal Co. v. Bellario*, 30 Ill. App. 3d 384, 385 (1975). Accordingly, we have no basis on which to find that the lower court abused its considerable discretion in awarding Father a tax exemption.

¶ 36 Mother next contends that the circuit court erred in awarding Father equal parenting time, especially in light of his prior hostile conduct, rule violations, and disruption of the primary caretaker bond. Section 602.7 of the Marriage Act governs the allocation of parenting time and requires the circuit court to allocate parenting time “according to the child’s best interests.” 750 ILCS 5/602.7(a) (West 2024). In determining the child’s best interests for purposes of allocating parenting time, the court must consider all relevant factors, including, but not limited to, the following factors set forth in section 602.7(b):

“(1) the wishes of each parent seeking parenting time;

(2) the wishes of the child, taking into account the child’s maturity and ability to express reasoned and independent preferences as to parenting time;

(3) the amount of time each parent spent performing caretaking functions with respect to the child in the 24 months preceding the filing of any petition for allocation of parental responsibilities or, if the child is under 2 years of age, since the child’s birth;

(4) any prior agreement or course of conduct between the parents relating to caretaking functions with respect to the child;

(5) the interaction and interrelationship of the child with his or her parents and siblings and with any other person who may significantly affect the child’s best interests;

(6) the child’s adjustment to his or her home, school, and community;

(7) the mental and physical health of all individuals involved;

(8) the child’s needs;

(9) the distance between the parents’ residences, the cost and difficulty of transporting the child, each parent’s and the child’s daily schedules, and the ability of the parents to cooperate in the arrangement;

(10) whether a restriction on parenting time is appropriate;

(11) the physical violence or threat of physical violence by the child’s parent directed against the child or other member of the child’s household;

(12) the willingness and ability of each parent to place the needs of the child ahead of his or her own needs;

(13) the willingness and ability of each parent to facilitate and encourage a close and continuing relationship between the other parent and the child;

(14) the occurrence of abuse against the child or other member of the child's household;

(15) whether one of the parents is a convicted sex offender or lives with a convicted sex offender and, if so, the exact nature of the offense and what if any treatment the offender has successfully participated in; the parties are entitled to a hearing on the issues raised in this paragraph (15);

(16) the terms of a parent's military family-care plan that a parent must complete before deployment if a parent is a member of the United States Armed Forces who is being deployed; and

(17) any other factor that the court expressly finds to be relevant." *Id.* § 602.7(b).

¶ 37 A circuit court's decision regarding the allocation of parenting time is afforded significant deference as the court generally is in the best position to assess the credibility of the witnesses and determine the child's best interests. *In re Marriage of Whitehead*, 2018 IL App (5th) 170380, ¶ 15. Thus, we will not reverse the lower court's decision unless the court abused its substantial discretion or its decision is against the manifest weight of the evidence. *Id.* A decision is against the manifest weight of the evidence when the opposite conclusion is clearly evident or when the court's findings are unreasonable, arbitrary, or not based on the evidence. *Jameson v. Williams*, 2020 IL App (3d) 200048, ¶ 47.

¶ 38 After reviewing the record before us, we cannot say that the circuit court's decision granting Father equal parenting time with the minor was an abuse of discretion or against the manifest weight of the evidence. As set forth above, the circuit court's August 27, 2025, allocation order addressed all relevant statutory factors and contained detailed findings as to each factor. In

that order, the court granted Father parenting time from Thursday evening to Sunday evening every other week, and from Thursday evening to Friday evening on alternating weeks. In the amended May 8, 2026, parenting time order, the court increased Father's parenting time such that he would have parenting time with the minor on an alternating week schedule. In other words, Father would have the minor for an entire week, then Mother would have her the following week, and so forth. This was to reduce the number of exchanges between the parties.

¶ 39 A review of the record reveals that the parties' problems primarily stemmed from these exchanges and had very little, if anything, to do with the minor. As the circuit court aptly observed, "[b]oth parties have engaged in petty behavior throughout these proceedings." To the extent Mother argues on appeal that it was not in the minor's best interest for Father to have equal parenting time given his "documented history of volatility," the lower court specifically found there was no evidence presented of physical violence or a threat of physical violence against the minor by him. Mother's own testimony was consistent with this finding. While Mother directs our attention to Father's courtroom outbursts, the record shows that he wrote a letter of apology to the court, acknowledging that his behavior was inappropriate and disrespectful. Furthermore, he did not have any such outburst at the May 8, 2026, hearing when the court awarded him equal parenting time.

¶ 40 Finally, the circuit court found that the minor had lived primarily with Mother since birth, but she had a close relationship with both parents. Additionally, the minor had regular parenting time with Father until February of 2025, when the court temporarily awarded all parenting time to Mother after Father left the courtroom during the court's ruling. The court further found that Father had purchased items for the minor and contributed financially upon Mother's request. He also inquired what, if anything, the minor needed and then purchased the same. Based on the foregoing,

we cannot say the lower court's decision awarding Father equal parenting time was arbitrary, fanciful, or unreasonable, or not based on the evidence. Accordingly, we find that decision was not an abuse of discretion or against the manifest weight of the evidence.

¶ 41 We now turn to Mother's contention that the circuit court erred in denying her petitions for indirect civil contempt against Father where he allegedly relocated to Evansville, Indiana, without notice, intentionally misled Mother and police regarding the minor's location, and violated the court's order by using his girlfriend, Jessica Aders-Watson, to transport the minor.

¶ 42 Indirect civil contempt occurs outside the presence of the circuit court, and proof of willful disobedience of a court order is necessary to any finding of indirect civil contempt. *In re Marriage of McCormick*, 2013 IL App (2d) 120100, ¶ 17. "Once the petitioner establishes by a preponderance of the evidence that a violation occurred, the alleged contemnor has the burden of showing that the violation was not willful and contumacious and that he or she had a valid excuse for failing to follow the order." *Id.* "Contumacious behavior consists of conduct calculated to embarrass, hinder, or obstruct a court in its administration of justice or [conduct] lessening the authority and dignity of the court." (Internal quotation marks omitted.) *Id.* We will not disturb the lower court's contempt determination unless it is against the manifest weight of the evidence or the record reveals an abuse of discretion. *Id.*

¶ 43 Here, Mother filed "emergency" contempt petitions on April 9 and 22, 2026. The crux of both petitions was that Father had relocated to Evansville, Indiana, while claiming he still lived in Illinois. Mother alleged that Father "intentionally misled" her and police regarding the minor's location. Mother further alleged that Father "willfully violat[ed]" the court's order by using his girlfriend, Aders-Watson, to transport the minor, even though she was not authorized to provide such transportation. According to Mother, Father used his sister, Camilla Gordon, as an end run

around the court's authority by having her sign the minor out from the Children's First Foundation, then immediately giving her to Aders-Watson, who was waiting in the parking lot.

¶ 44 In denying Mother's contempt petitions, the circuit court found that the alleged actions by Father, while perhaps "obnoxious," did not violate any court orders. We agree. Specifically, the court noted that Father was not prohibited from taking the minor to Evansville, Indiana, and that Aders-Watson was not prohibited from providing transportation for the minor during Father's parenting time. Likewise, a review of the record shows that the "relocation" provision in the parenting time orders applied to situations where the primary parent for residential purposes, here Mother, wanted to move the minor's primary residence "over 25 or 50" miles away from where she currently resided. It did not apply to Father temporarily taking the minor to a neighboring state during his parenting time. Insofar as Mother avers that Father did not notify her when he took the minor to Indiana, she has not cited any evidence to support that assertion.

¶ 45 Moreover, the parenting time orders clearly authorized Father's sister, Camilla Gordon, to transport the minor. As Mother admitted, Gordon signed the minor out of the Children's First Foundation, and nothing in the orders stated that she could not then give the minor to Aders-Watson for further transportation. Mother has not established that any of the alleged actions by Father violated courts orders, let alone that they were willful or contumacious. Accordingly, we cannot say the circuit court's denial of her contempt petitions was against the manifest weight of the evidence or amounted to an abuse of discretion.

¶ 46 Last, we reject Mother's contention that the circuit court abused its discretion when it refused to review relevant police body camera footage purportedly showing Father in Indiana when he was supposed to be in Illinois with the minor. See *People ex rel. Sherman v. Cryns*, 203 Ill. 2d

264, 284 (2003) (stating that “[t]he admission of a videotape into evidence is within the sound discretion of the circuit court and will not be disturbed absent an abuse of discretion”).

¶ 47 Our supreme court has made clear that a videotape may be admitted as demonstrative evidence if it is properly authenticated and relevant to a particular issue in the case. *Id.* at 283. This requires a foundation to be laid, by someone having personal knowledge of the filmed object, that the film is an accurate representation of what it purports to show. *Id.* at 283-84. Additionally, a videotape is relevant only if its probative value is not substantially outweighed by the danger of unfair prejudice. *Id.* at 284. Here, Mother sought to admit police body camera footage from the Evansville Police Department in Indiana, but she did not present anyone from the Evansville Police Department to authenticate the footage. Therefore, the circuit court was not permitted to admit that footage as evidence. Accordingly, we find no abuse of discretion.

¶ 48 For the foregoing reasons, the circuit court did not err in awarding Father either a multi-family child support reduction and tax exemption or equal parenting time. Additionally, the court properly denied Mother’s contempt petitions and refused to review the police body camera footage that was not authenticated. The judgment of the circuit court is affirmed.

¶ 49 Affirmed.