



Missouri House of Representatives

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Missouri House Passes HB 737 to Strengthen Protections for Foster Children

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. – The Missouri House of Representatives has passed House Bill 737, legislation aimed at improving the welfare of foster children across the state. Sponsored by State Rep. Melissa Schmidt, the bill ensures that federal benefits intended for foster children are used solely for their unmet needs, rather than being absorbed by the state.

Currently, an estimated 1,200 foster children in Missouri qualify for benefits from the Social Security or Veterans Administrations, or railroad retirement benefits, often because they are the survivors of deceased parents or because they have disabilities. The state Children's Division takes those benefits to cover the costs of caring for those children. This practice of seizing these benefits shocked lawmakers from both political parties, who called it an unjust misuse of funds and condemned it as harmful to Missouri's vulnerable children. HB 737 ensures these benefits will instead go directly toward the child's unmet needs or future independence.

"We have a responsibility to be good stewards for foster children, good stewards of their care, and good stewards of their finances. Missouri's foster children deserve every opportunity to succeed," Rep. Schmidt, R-Eldridge, said. "I think we can all agree that for Missouri children, we can do better. By ensuring their benefits are used for tuition, job training, and essential needs, we're giving these kids the foundation they need for a better future."

In addition to financial protections, the bill clarifies that reasonable, age-appropriate independent activities—such as walking to school, playing outside, or staying home alone for short periods—do not constitute neglect. This measure supports parents and guardians in fostering healthy childhood independence.

Another key provision requires the Children's Division to prioritize placing children with individuals or institutions that share the child's religious faith, mirroring a practice already required of Missouri courts.

HB 737 received strong bipartisan backing, with lawmakers and child welfare advocates emphasizing the importance of these reforms.

Following a House vote of 149-1, the bill now moves to the Missouri Senate, where supporters hope for swift passage. If enacted, Missouri will join other states that have already stopped the practice of using foster children's benefits to cover state expenses, ensuring a brighter future for the most vulnerable children in the system.

Representative Melissa Schmidt, a Republican, represents Wright County and parts of Laclede, Webster, and Douglas Counties (District 141) in the Missouri House of Representatives. She was elected to her first two-year term in November 2024. For more information, please contact Rep. Schmidt's office at 573-751-2205 or by email at Melissa.Schmidt@House.Mo.Gov.

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