

HCS HB 2508 -- PLACEMENT OF GRANDCHILDREN

SPONSOR: Franz (Ruestman)

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "do pass" by the Special Committee on Family Services by a vote of 9 to 0.

This substitute requires the Children's Division within the Department of Social Services to make a good faith attempt to contact and place a child with a grandparent if the division deems the placement is in the best interest of the child when a child must be removed from his or her primary caretaker's home in the case of an emergency placement. Prior to contacting the grandparent, the division must care for any physical health needs of the child. The grandparent must comply with the emergency background check requirements. If contact with a grandparent cannot be made within three hours of the division determining an emergency placement is necessary, the child may be placed in a foster home. If placed in a foster home, the division must continue to attempt to contact the child's grandparents during the initial 24-hour period after an emergency placement was deemed necessary.

When a court determines that a child must be placed in a foster home, the division must make a good faith attempt to contact the grandparents of the child to determine if they wish to be considered and given first consideration for foster home placement of the child.

FISCAL NOTE: Estimated Cost on General Revenue Fund of Unknown but Greater than \$450,481 in FY 2009, Unknown but Greater than \$471,259 in FY 2010, and Unknown but Greater than \$485,397 in FY 2011. No impact on Other State Funds in FY 2009, FY 2010, and FY 2011.

PROPOSERS: Supporters say that the bill provides statutory authority for procedures and practices that are currently practiced by the Children's Division in regards to providing preferential placement of children with grandparents in the case of emergency or temporary placements. Grandparents would just be given the option to be considered as a placement for the child. The provisions of the bill were developed on the principle of acting in the best interest of the child. When there is a grandparent who is willing and able to care for their grandchild, the child does not need to be taken into protective custody by the division. The grandparents are made to feel that they are interfering with the process of foster care by the Children's Division; and therefore, are not currently being given a priority for placement when both parents are not able to care for a child. The provisions are long overdue and necessary to help correct

problems within the foster care system. The bill only applies to emergency placement situations where both parents are unable to care for the child so the grandparents would not be competing with parents. The bill does not supersede any other sections of law that would disqualify a grandparent for placement; therefore, it does not give rights to grandparents if they would be otherwise disqualified. The division will have more than enough flexibility and will not have any additional conditions.

Testifying for the bill were Representatives Ruestman and Emery; Jean Campbell; and Missouri Family Network.

OPPONENTS: There was no opposition voiced to the committee.

OTHERS: Others testifying on the bill say kinship care is very important to good outcomes for children. Research shows that kinship care is the best for children because there is already a loving connection. Obstacles do exist for grandparents to care for their grandchildren, and the Grandparents as Foster Parents Program needs to be reinstated.

Testifying on the bill was Partnership for Children.