

HCS HB 1047 -- NONCUSTODIAL PARENT STATE DEBT

SPONSOR: Zerr

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass" by the Standing Committee on Children and Families by a vote of 12 to 0. Voted "Do Pass with HCS" by the Select Committee on Social Services by a vote of 10 to 0.

This bill changes the law regarding state debt owed by noncustodial parents. The bill requires the Department of Social Services to establish a pilot program to allow noncustodial parents to reduce the amount of state debt owed based on the number of hours of participation in the program. The amount of state debt must not be reduced by more than \$2,000. The program does not change the noncustodial parent's child support obligations or compromise any arrears owed to the custodial parent or spouse. The goals of the program must include empowering the noncustodial parents with the necessary resources to achieve gainful employment and encouraging noncustodial parents to be engaged with their children and to take financial responsibility for their children's well-being. A noncustodial parent must be removed from the program for not demonstrating good faith efforts to achieve these goals. Noncustodial parents must not be subject to prosecution for criminal nonsupport during participation in the program or for a year following completion of the program.

The department must establish rules and regulations implementing the provisions of the bill within 180 days of the bill's effective date and the department must submit a report to the General Assembly one year following the establishment of rules, which must include information as specified in the bill.

The provisions of the bill must expire on August 28, 2018.

PROPONENTS: Supporters say that the Department of Health and Human Services estimates that there has been \$100 billion in unpaid child support since 1972. Missouri accounts for over \$2 billion of the debt, with 60% being owed to the state. Forty-four states and the District of Columbia have policies to compromise child support debt owed to the state; Missouri is one of only six states that doesn't have a program. Similar programs have led to success in collecting arrears that were previously considered uncollectible debt. Since the inception of a similar program in Kansas, only \$227,000 of arrears has been forgiven. Child support can result from a dissolution of marriage or when a low-income, custodial parent applies for assistance through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. When TANF is received by the custodial parent, a case is opened against the noncustodial parent as debt to

be repaid to state. The child support is owed to the state by the noncustodial parent for the time the state cared for the children through TANF. For individuals who are not employed, the program allows them to receive training and employment so the money gets collected. In Missouri the average debt owed to the state is \$5,000. The bill caps the amount of money that may be forgiven at a maximum of \$2,000.

Testifying for the bill were Representative Zerr; Napoleon Williams III; and Adrian Bruce.

OPPONENTS: There was no opposition voiced to the committee.