

HCS HB 1414 -- PROTECTION OF CHILDREN

SPONSOR: Solon

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass with HCS" by the Standing Committee on Children and Families by a vote of 13 to 0. Voted "Do Pass" by the Standing Committee on Rules- Administrative Oversight by a vote of 8 to 0.

This bill requires the Children's Division within the Department of Social Services to complete a standard risk assessment within 72 hours of a report of abuse or neglect as part of its structured decision-making protocols. However, the bill also requires the division and the Office of the State Court Administrator to develop a joint safety assessment tool before December 31, 2020 to replace the current risk assessment. The safety assessment tool must be implemented before January 1, 2022.

The bill prohibits the division from requiring foster parents to conduct or be present for supervised visits with a child in their care.

The bill states that the court shall only require a child to appear in court if necessary for making a decision and after considering all of the information provided by the division and family support team and the appropriateness of the courtroom environment and the hardship to the child and current guardians.

The following is a summary of the public testimony from the committee hearing. The testimony was based on the introduced version of the bill.

PROPOSERS: Supporters say that this is a good bill because the risk assessment is important. Staff who were trained under the old system still use it, even if not formally, but new staff have never had the benefit of learning how to do the old assessment.

Testifying for the bill were Representative Solon; Kids Win Missouri; Missouri Coalition Of Children's Agencies; Foster Adopt Connect; Missouri Kids First; and Children's Trust Fund.

OPPOSERS: There was no opposition voiced to the committee.

OTHERS: Others testifying on the bill say that the Office of Child Advocate led the Task Force on Child Safety last year and recommended a return to the risk assessment.

Testifying on the bill was Office of Child Advocate.