



## Senate Approves Child Protection Bill

### *Legislation Increases Supports for Foster and Adoptive Families*

The Senate debated and perfected a wide-ranging child welfare package on the floor this week. SB 327, sponsored by Senator Andrew Koenig (R-Manchester), requires a vote on the Senate floor before it can move to the House for consideration.

The bill expands eligibility for the Special Needs Adoption Credit, which has gone largely unused in recent years, to include families who adopt any child. The cap for the program would be increased from \$2 million to \$6 million annually. SB 327 also creates a tax deduction to offset the expenses of foster families. These provisions are high priorities for Speaker Rob Vescovo (R-Arnold) and were included in the first bills passed out of the House.

SB 327 now includes language sponsored by Representative Hannah Kelly (R-Mountain Grove) and Senator Bill White (R-Joplin) to create a Birth Match program. This program would use data in the Department of Social Services' central registry to alert the Children's Division when a child is born to a parent who previously had their parental rights terminated due to abuse or neglect or was found guilty of certain sexual offenses or murder against a child. The division, or local providers, would reach out to these at-risk families to offer voluntary, preventative services.

The bill changes numerous provisions regarding termination of parental rights and adoption proceedings. As an example, SB 327 adds a presumption that a parent is unfit if the child has been in foster care for 15 of the past 22 months.

SB 327 is one of several bills moving with similar child welfare provisions. The budget, as passed by the House, also contains funding to increase supports for foster and adoptive families. This includes boosting the clothing allowances for children in foster care and raising monthly maintenance payments for foster families.

### Dates of Interest

#### *January*

- **6** - First Day of Session
- **18** - No Session, Martin Luther King Jr. Day
- **27** - State of the State Address

### House Perfects Lifetime Protection Orders Bill

The House gave initial approval to legislation that would provide judges the option to issue lifetime protection orders upon proof that the defendant poses a serious danger. HB 744 is sponsored by Representative Lane Roberts (R-Joplin).

During the bill's committee hearing, the Missouri Coalition

## March

- 1 - Bill Filing Deadline
- 12 - Legislative Spring Break Begins
- 22 - Legislature Reconvenes

## April

- 5 - No Session, Easter Break

## May

- 7 - Budget Bills Must be Passed
- 14 - Last Day of Session

Against Domestic and Sexual Violence and several domestic violence survivors testified in support of this bill. They explained that having to regularly renew protection orders is costly and forces individuals who have been abused or threatened to appear in the same place as their abuser. The abuser then knows their location at a specific time and may have the opportunity to cross examine them as part of the renewal process. There was no opposition voiced during the hearing.

On the floor, language was added by Representative Tracy McCreery (D-St. Louis) to expand the reasons an order of protection can be issued to include abusing pets. The sponsor spoke in support of the amendment, saying abusers can target pets as a means to threaten or torment someone.

HB 744 requires a final vote in the House to move to the Senate.

## News in Brief

- The House Committee on Downsizing State Government will hear HB 517, sponsored by Representative Dan Shaul (R-Imperial), on Wednesday. This bill raises Missouri's minimum age for tobacco sale to 21, which was done at the federal level in 2019. HB 517 also preempts local tobacco regulations and would have state law supersede local ordinances, except local tobacco taxes.
- The Senate Education Committee is scheduled to consider legislation to create a formal process for parents to file objections with their school board regarding any policy, practice, or procedure not required by law. SB 352 is sponsored by Senator Andrew Koenig (R-Manchester).
- The House third read and passed the bills that comprise the FY 2022 operating budget on Thursday. On Tuesday, members had the opportunity to offer amendments to the budget on the floor. Some of the most controversial amendments attempted to restore funds for Medicaid Expansion, which the House Budget Committee voted to reject. Amendments to reinstate funding for Expansion were defeated largely along party lines, with the vast majority of Republicans voting in opposition. The budget bills will now move to the Senate Appropriations Committee, which will amend the bills in their mark-up process.
- The House and Senate passed legislation this week to create a framework to permit personal delivery devices, or robotic devices designed for last-mile deliveries, on roadways and sidewalks. HB 592, sponsored by Representative Travis Fitzwater (R-Holts Summit), passed the House 141 to 1. SB 176, sponsored by Senator Lincoln Hough (R-Springfield), passed the Senate 32 to 0.
- On Thursday, Senate leadership brought up the Governor's appointment of Todd Graves to the University of Missouri System Board of Curators. The confirmation was stalled for several hours on the floor by a bipartisan group of Senators. Graves is a partner at a Kansas City law firm as well as a former US Attorney and Missouri Republican Party Chair. Senate President Pro Tem Dave Schatz

(R-Sullivan) said the confirmation could be brought up again when the Senate resumes work on Tuesday after the holiday on Monday.

- Legislation from Senator Holly Rehder (R-Scott City) to create a statewide prescription drug monitoring program (PDMP) was perfected by the Senate after a lengthy debate on Monday. Missouri is the only state without a statewide PDMP, though over 80% of the state's population is covered because other jurisdictions have joined the St. Louis County program. Perfection is a significant step because in previous years, PDMP legislation has been blocked in the Senate due to concerns about privacy and government overreach. [SB 63](#) requires a final vote on the Senate floor to move to the House.



*The Way We Work Says It All*