

HB 713 -- REPORTS OF CHILD ABUSE COMMITTED BY JUVENILES

SPONSOR: Lant

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass" by the Standing Committee on Children and Families by a vote of 11 to 0.

This bill specifies that upon the receipt of a hotline report of child abuse or neglect where the subject of the report is any person, less than 14 years of age, who has allegedly committed sexual abuse against another younger child, the Children's Division within the Department of Social Services must immediately communicate the report to the appropriate local office along with any relevant information as may be contained in the information system. Upon receipt of the report and information, the local office must use a family assessment and services approach to respond to the allegation contained in the report.

These provisions cannot prohibit the local office from commencing an investigation if it, at any point in using the family assessment and services approach, determines that an investigation is required. The investigation must comply with specified provisions and may include requesting assistance from the appropriate law enforcement agency.

PROPOSERS: Supporters say that addressing youth with problem sexual behaviors is key to curbing child abuse in Missouri. Currently, the state is not doing enough to address youths with sexual problem behaviors. The state uses all of its resources on adult offenders who have limited ability to change. Missouri doesn't intervene when a child is abused by another youth most times, and it leads to great harm later. The Children's Division cannot provide assessments when the perpetrator of the abuse does not have care, custody, and control of the abused child; the division can only refer the case to the juvenile office or law enforcement. As the law currently stands, it discriminates against children who are abused by other juveniles. There is a lack of a consistent systematic response to sexual abuse of a child. The bill allows earlier intervention that can stop what causes a lot of the sexual abuse problems that occur later in life.

Testifying for the bill were Representative Lant; Missouri Kids First; Rebecca Wekenborg; Missouri Association for Social Welfare; Missouri Juvenile Justice Association; Missouri Coalition of Children's Agencies; and Missouri Children's Leadership Council.

OPPOSERS: There was no opposition voiced to the committee.