

HB 1965 -- STATE DEBT NONCUSTODIAL PARENTS

SPONSOR: Zerr

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass" by the Standing Committee on Children and Families by a vote of 11 to 0. Voted "Do Pass" by the Select Committee on Social Services by a vote of 10 to 0.

This bill changes the laws 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 completion of the program. The amount of state debt must not be reduced by more than \$2,000. The program must not change the noncustodial parent's monthly child support obligations or compromise any arrears owed to the custodial parent or any spousal support arrears and must not incur any direct cost to the state through general revenue or any other funding source. 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 if at any time the department determines that he or she is not demonstrating good faith efforts to achieve these goals, must not receive a reduction in the amount of state debt owed, and must not be allowed to reenter the program.

The department must establish rules and regulations implementing the provisions of the bill within a year of the bill's effective date, and the department must submit a report to the General Assembly based upon the results submitted by participating organizations two years and five months following the establishment of rules that includes information as specified in the bill.

The provisions of the bill will expire on August 28, 2020.

This bill is similar to HB 1797 (2016) and HB 1047 (2015).

PROPOSERS: 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. 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.

Testifying for the bill were Representative Zerr; Napoleon Williams III, Connections To Success; Jennifer Moropun; and Adrian Bruce.

OPPONENTS: There was no opposition voiced to the committee.