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Omnibus Child Protection Bill Passes MO General Assembly

Abbreviated session sees wins for kids

May 15, 2020—House Bill 1414, sponsored by Representative Sheila Solon (R – St. Joseph) was truly agreed and finally passed by the Missouri General Assembly yesterday, sending an omnibus package of child protections to Missouri Governor Mike Parson’s desk.

“Missouri’s children and our child welfare system had great needs prior to the COVID crisis,” said Craig Stevenson, Director of Policy and Advocacy for Kids Win Missouri. “The crisis has only exacerbated and further exposed some of these needs, and we’re glad the legislature was able to come together in a bipartisan way to protect our children.”

HB 1414 included key priorities to protect children, including:

- Ensuring youth who are homeless have access to a birth certificate for free, have access to health coverage through Medicaid and can seek mental health care
- Fixing a background check duplication issue for child care providers and allowing for non-expiring child care licenses
- Creating temporary alternative placement agreements for foster children
- Ensuring timely risk assessments within 72 hours of child abuse and neglect reports
- Guaranteeing protections for employees of child advocacy centers

Advocates have had increasing concerns for children experiencing abuse and neglect, particularly with the various stay-at-home orders in place throughout the state and children having less access to mandated reporters, like teachers or child care providers.

“Through the pandemic with a decrease in calls to the child abuse and neglect hotline and growing concern for the well-being of our children,” said Jessica Seitz, Director of Public Policy. “By requiring the Missouri Children’s Division to complete a standard risk assessment within 72 hours of a report of child abuse and neglect, creating temporary alternative placement agreements, and including protections for employees of child advocacy centers, HB 1414 prioritizes improving our child welfare system and the safety of our most vulnerable children.”

Many of the bills provisions also aim to help youth who are homeless in accessing vital health care and records.
“We’re thankful for the forward thinking legislature understanding that investing in and protecting youth experiencing homelessness has a great human return and is good for all Missouri,” said Mary Chant, CEO of the Missouri Coalition of Children’s Agencies.

Though there were some provisions of the bill that were omitted in the final version, advocates are hopeful that the new policies will help keep children safe and healthy.

“Our work is far from over, but given the current circumstances, we are grateful the General Assembly took the steps to further support child well-being in our state,” Stevenson said. “This legislation included the work of many legislators on both sides of the isle and we look forward to continuing to work throughout the interim and into next legislative session to build on the progress made this year.”

The legislative session ends today, by Constitutional deadline, at 6PM.