

FIRST REGULAR SESSION
SENATE COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE FOR

SENATE BILLS NOS. 44 & 59

91ST GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Reported from the Committee on Aging, Families and Mental Health, February 1, 2001, with recommendation that the Senate Committee Substitute do pass.

TERRY L. SPIELER, Secretary.

0324S.03C

AN ACT

To repeal sections 453.010, 453.070 and 453.080, RSMo 2000, relating to adoption, and to enact in lieu thereof four new sections relating to the same subject.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Missouri, as follows:

Section A. Sections 453.010, 453.070 and 453.080, RSMo 2000, are repealed and four new sections enacted in lieu thereof, to be known as sections 191.975, 453.010, 453.070 and 453.080, to read as follows:

191.975. 1. This section shall be known and may be cited as the "Adoption Awareness Law".

2. In order to raise public awareness and educate the public, the division of maternal, child and family health in the department of health, in conjunction with the department of social services and with the office of women's health in the department of health, shall be responsible for:

(1) Collecting resource materials in order to educate communities about foster care and adoption;

(2) Establishing and promoting education materials which shall include a toll-free telephone number established by the department and which may include a video, brochures or public relations campaigns about adoption and foster care for public use and for use as a part of the department of health's family planning and education programs. The material shall include, but not be limited to, information about:

(a) The benefits of adoption and foster care;

EXPLANATION--Matter enclosed in bold-faced brackets [thus] in this bill is not enacted and is intended to be omitted in the law.

- (b) Adoption and foster care procedures;**
 - (c) Methods of payment;**
 - (d) Methods of controlling the adoption of a child, including the choice of adoptive parents;**
 - (e) Protection for and rights, or lack thereof, of the birth parents prior to and following the adoption;**
 - (f) Location of adoption and foster care agencies;**
 - (g) Discussion of various state health programs for women and children, including medical assistance programs, as well as income assistance programs; and**
 - (h) Direction to appropriate counseling services which shall include, but not be limited to, information for parents who elect to keep their children;**
- (3) Such materials shall be made available through department of health clinics and family planning programs, and privately-funded adoption agencies, and abortion facilities, as defined in section 188.015, RSMo, and private physicians for distribution to their patients who request such material. Such materials may be made available to the public through the department of health's Internet website.**

3. The duties prescribed in this section shall be subject to appropriations by the general assembly.

4. The division shall promulgate rules and regulations for the implementation of this section in accordance with chapter 536, RSMo.

453.010. 1. Any person desiring to adopt another person as his or her child shall petition the juvenile division of the circuit court of the county in which:

- (1) The person seeking to adopt resides;
- (2) The child sought to be adopted was born;
- (3) The child is located at the time of the filing of the petition; or
- (4) Either birth person resides.

2. A petition to adopt shall not be dismissed or denied on the grounds that the petitioner is not domiciled or does not reside in any of the venues set forth in subdivision (2), (3) or (4) of subsection 1 of this section.

3. If the person sought to be adopted is a child who is under the prior and continuing jurisdiction of a court pursuant to the provision of chapter 211, RSMo, any person desiring to adopt such person as his or her child shall petition the juvenile division of the circuit court which has jurisdiction over the child for permission to adopt such person as his or her child. Upon receipt of a motion from the petitioner and consent of the receiving court, the juvenile division of the circuit court which has jurisdiction over the child may transfer jurisdiction to the juvenile division of a circuit court within any of the alternative venues set forth in subsection 1 of this section.

4. If the petitioner has a spouse living and competent to join in the petition, such spouse

may join therein, and in such case the adoption shall be by them jointly. If such a spouse does not join the petition the court in its discretion may, after a hearing, order such joinder, and if such order is not complied with may dismiss the petition.

5. Upon receipt of a properly filed petition, a court, as defined in this section, shall hear such petition in a timely fashion. A court or any child-placing agency shall not deny or delay the placement of a child for adoption when an approved family is available, regardless of the approved family's residence or domicile. **The court shall expedite the placement of a child for adoption pursuant to subsection 3 of this section.**

453.070. 1. Except as provided in subsection 5 of this section, no decree for the adoption of a child under eighteen years of age shall be entered for the petitioner or petitioners in such adoption as ordered by the juvenile court having jurisdiction, until a full investigation, which includes an assessment of the adoptive parents, an appropriate postplacement assessment and a summary of written reports as provided for in section 453.026, and any other pertinent information relevant to whether the child is suitable for adoption by the petitioner and whether the petitioner is suitable as a parent for the child, has been made. The report shall also include a statement to the effect that the child has been considered as a potential subsidy recipient.

2. Such investigation shall be made, as directed by the court having jurisdiction, either by the division of family services of the state department of social services, a juvenile court officer, a licensed child-placement agency, a social worker licensed pursuant to chapter 337, RSMo, or other suitable person appointed by the court. The results of such investigation shall be embodied in a written report that shall be submitted to the court within ninety days of the request for the investigation.

3. The department of social services, division of family services, shall develop rules and regulations regarding the content of the assessment of the petitioner or petitioners. The content of the assessment shall include but not be limited to, a report on the condition of the petitioner's home and information on the petitioner's education, financial, marital, medical and psychological status and criminal background check. If an assessment is conducted after August 28, 1997, but prior to the promulgation of rules and regulations by the department concerning the contents of such assessment, any discrepancy between the contents of the actual assessment and the contents of the assessment required by department rule shall not be used as the sole basis for invalidating an adoption. No rule or portion of a rule promulgated pursuant to the authority of this section shall become effective unless it has been promulgated pursuant to the provisions of chapter 536, RSMo.

4. The assessment of petitioner or petitioners shall be submitted to the petitioner and to the court prior to the scheduled hearing of the adoptive petition.

5. In cases where the adoption or custody involves a child under eighteen years of age that is the natural child of one of the petitioners and where all of the parents required by this chapter to give consent to the adoption or transfer of custody have given such consent, the juvenile court

may waive the investigation and report, except the criminal background check, and enter the decree for the adoption or order the transfer of custody without such investigation and report.

6. In the case of an investigation and report made by the division of family services by order of the court, the court may order the payment of a reasonable fee by the petitioner to cover the costs of the investigation and report.

7. Any adult person or persons over the age of eighteen, who, as foster parent or parents, have cared for a foster child continuously for a period of [twelve] **nine** months or more and bonding has occurred as evidenced by the positive emotional and physical interaction between the foster parent and child, may apply to such authorized agency for the placement of such child with them for the purpose of adoption if the child is eligible for adoption. The agency and court shall give preference and first consideration for adoptive placements to foster parents. However, the final determination of the propriety of the adoption of such foster child shall be within the sole discretion of the court.

453.080. 1. The court shall conduct a hearing to determine whether the adoption shall be finalized. During such hearing, the court shall ascertain whether:

(1) The person sought to be adopted, if a child, has been in the lawful and actual custody of the petitioner for a period of at least six months prior to entry of the adoption decree; **except that the six month period shall be waived if the person sought to be adopted is a child who is under the prior and continuing jurisdiction of a court pursuant to chapter 211, RSMo, and the person desiring to adopt the child is the child's current foster parent.** "Lawful and actual custody" shall include a transfer of custody pursuant to the laws of this state, another state, a territory of the United States, or another country;

(2) The court has received and reviewed a postplacement assessment on the monthly contacts with the adoptive family pursuant to section 453.077, except for good cause shown in the case of a child adopted from a foreign country;

(3) The court has received and reviewed an updated financial affidavit;

(4) The court has received the recommendations of the guardian ad litem and has received and reviewed the recommendations of the person placing the child, the person making the assessment and the person making the postplacement assessment;

(5) There is compliance with the uniform child custody jurisdiction act, sections 452.440 to 452.550, RSMo;

(6) There is compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act, if applicable;

(7) There is compliance with the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children pursuant to section 210.620, RSMo; and

(8) It is fit and proper that such adoption should be made.

2. If a petition for adoption has been filed pursuant to section 453.010 and a transfer of custody has occurred pursuant to section 453.110, the court may authorize the filing for finalization

in another state if the adoptive parents are domiciled in that state.

3. If the court determines the adoption should be finalized, a decree shall be issued setting forth the facts and ordering that from the date of the decree the adoptee shall be for all legal intents and purposes the child of the petitioner or petitioners. The court may decree that the name of the person sought to be adopted be changed, according to the prayer of the petition.

4. Before the completion of an adoption, the exchange of information among the parties shall be at the discretion of the parties. Upon completion of an adoption, further contact among the parties shall be at the discretion of the adoptive parents. The court shall not have jurisdiction to deny continuing contact between the adopted person and the birth parent, or an adoptive parent and a birth parent. Additionally, the court shall not have jurisdiction to deny an exchange of identifying information between an adoptive parent and a birth parent.

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