

FIRST REGULAR SESSION

# SENATE BILL NO. 471

92ND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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INTRODUCED BY SENATOR BARTLE.

Read 1st time February 10, 2003, and 1,000 copies ordered printed.

TERRY L. SPIELER, Secretary.

1633S.011

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## AN ACT

To repeal section 454.505, RSMo, and to enact in lieu thereof one new section relating to filing of garnishment orders.

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

Section A. Section 454.505, RSMo, is repealed and one new section enacted in lieu thereof, to be known as section 454.505, to read as follows:

454.505. 1. In addition to any other remedy provided by law for the enforcement of support, if a support order has been entered, the director shall issue an order directing any employer or other payor of the parent to withhold and pay over to the division, the payment center pursuant to section 454.530 or the clerk of the circuit court in the county in which a trusteeship is or will be established, money due or to become due the obligated parent in an amount not to exceed federal wage garnishment limitations. For administrative child support orders issued pursuant to sections other than section 454.476, the director shall not issue an order to withhold and pay over in any case in which:

(1) One of the parties demonstrates, and the director finds, that there is good cause not to require immediate income withholding. For purposes of this subdivision, any finding that there is good cause not to require immediate withholding shall be based on, at least, a written determination and an explanation by the director that implementing immediate wage withholding would not be in the best interests of the child and proof of timely payments of previously ordered support in cases involving the modification of support orders; or

(2) A written agreement is reached between the parties that provides for an alternative payment arrangement.

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

If the income of an obligor is not withheld as of the effective date of the support order, pursuant to subdivision (1) or (2) of this subsection, or otherwise, such obligor's income shall become subject to withholding pursuant to this section, without further exception, on the date on which the obligor becomes delinquent in maintenance or child support payments in an amount equal to one month's total support obligation.

2. An order entered pursuant to this section shall recite the amount required to be paid as continuing support, the amount to be paid monthly for arrearages and the Social Security number of the obligor if available. In addition, the order shall contain a provision that the obligor shall notify the division of child support enforcement regarding the availability of medical insurance coverage through an employer or a group plan, provide the name of the insurance provider when coverage is available, and inform the division of any change in access to such insurance coverage. A copy of section 454.460 and this section shall be appended to the order.[A copy of such order shall be filed with the circuit court in the county or city not within a county in which the judgment of dissolution or paternity was entered, or if no such judgment was entered, in the county or city not within a county where either parent or the child resides or where the order or judgment is filed or registered.]

3. An order entered pursuant to this section shall be served on the employer or other payor by certified mail, return receipt requested or may be issued through electronic means, and shall be binding on the employer or other payor two weeks after mailing or electronic issuance of such service. A copy of the order and a notice of property exempt from withholding shall be mailed to the obligor at the obligor's last known address. The notice shall advise the obligor that the withholding has commenced and the procedures to contest such withholding pursuant to section 454.475 on the grounds that such withholding or the amount withheld is improper due to a mistake of fact by requesting a hearing thirty days from mailing the notice. At such a hearing the certified copy of the court order and the sworn or certified statement of arrearages shall constitute prima facie evidence that the director's order is valid and enforceable. If a prima facie case is established, the obligor may only assert mistake of fact as a defense. For purposes of this section, "mistake of fact" means an error in the amount of the withholding or an error as to the identity of the obligor. The obligor shall have the burden of proof on such issues. The obligor may not obtain relief from the withholding by paying the overdue support. The employer or other payor shall withhold from the earnings or other income of each obligor the amount specified in the order, and may deduct an additional sum not to exceed six dollars per month as reimbursement for costs, except that the total amount withheld shall not exceed the limitations contained in the federal Consumer Credit Protection Act, 15 U.S.C. 1673(b). The employer or other payor shall transmit the payments as directed in the order within seven business days of the date the earnings, money due or other income was payable to the obligor. For purposes of this section, "business day" means a day that state offices are open for regular business. The

employer or other payor shall, along with the amounts transmitted, provide the date the amount was withheld from each obligor. If the order does not contain the Social Security number of the obligor, the employer or other payor shall not be liable for withholding from the incorrect obligor.

4. If the order is served on a payor other than an employer, it shall be a lien against any money due or to become due the obligated parent which is in the possession of the payor on the date of service or which may come into the possession of the payor after service until further order of the director, except for any deposits held in two or more names in a financial institution.

5. The division shall notify an employer or other payor upon whom such an order has been directed whenever all arrearages have been paid in full, and whenever, for any other reason, the amount required to be withheld and paid over to the payment center pursuant to the order as to future pay periods is to be reduced or redirected. If the parent's support obligation is required to be paid monthly and the parent's pay periods are at more frequent intervals, the employer or other payor may, at the request of the obligee or the director, withhold and pay over to the payment center, an equal amount at each pay period cumulatively sufficient to comply with the withholding order.

6. An order issued pursuant to subsection 1 of this section shall be a continuing order and shall remain in effect and be binding upon any employer or other payor upon whom it is directed until a further order of the director. Such orders shall terminate when all children for whom the support order applies are emancipated or deceased, or the support obligation otherwise ends, and all arrearages are paid. No order to withhold shall be terminated solely because the obligor has fully paid arrearages.

7. An order issued pursuant to subsection 1 of this section shall have priority over any other legal process pursuant to state law against the same wages, except that where the other legal process is an order issued pursuant to this section or section 452.350, RSMo, the processes shall run concurrently, up to applicable wage withholding limitations. If concurrently running wage withholding processes for the collection of support obligations would cause the amounts withheld from the wages of the obligor to exceed applicable wage withholding limitations and includes a wage withholding from another state pursuant to section 454.932, the employer shall first satisfy current support obligations by dividing the amount available to be withheld among the orders on a pro rata basis using the percentages derived from the relationship each current support order amount has to the sum of all current child support obligations. Thereafter, arrearages shall be satisfied using the same pro rata distribution procedure used for distributing current support, up to the applicable limitation. If concurrently running wage withholding processes for the collection of support obligations would cause the amounts withheld from the wages of the obligor to exceed applicable wage withholding limitations and does not include a wage withholding from another state pursuant to section 454.932, the employer shall withhold and pay to the payment center an amount equal to the wage withholding limitations. The

payment center shall first satisfy current support obligations by dividing the amount available to be withheld among the orders on a pro rata basis using the percentages derived from the relationship each current support order amount has to the sum of all current child support obligations. Thereafter, arrearages shall be satisfied using the same pro rata distribution procedure used for distributing current support, up to the applicable limitation.

8. No employer or other payor who complies with an order entered pursuant to this section shall be liable to the parent, or to any other person claiming rights derived from the parent, for wrongful withholding. An employer or other payor who fails or refuses to withhold or pay the amounts as ordered pursuant to this section shall be liable to the party holding the support rights in an amount equal to the amount which became due the parent during the relevant period and which, pursuant to the order, should have been withheld and paid over. The director is hereby authorized to bring an action in circuit court to determine the liability of an employer or other payor for failure to withhold or pay the amounts as ordered. If a court finds that a violation has occurred, the court may fine the employer in an amount not to exceed five hundred dollars. The court may also enter a judgment against the employer for the amounts to be withheld or paid, court costs and reasonable attorney's fees.

9. The remedy provided by this section shall be available where the state or any of its political subdivisions is the employer or other payor of the obligated parent in the same manner and to the same extent as where the employer or other payor is a private party.

10. An employer shall not discharge, or refuse to hire or otherwise discipline an employee as a result of an order to withhold and pay over certain money authorized by this section. If any such employee is discharged within thirty days of the date upon which an order to withhold and pay over certain money is to take effect, there shall arise a rebuttable presumption that such discharge was a result of such order. This presumption shall be overcome only by clear, cogent and convincing evidence produced by the employer that the employee was not terminated because of the order to withhold and pay over certain money. The director is hereby authorized to bring an action in circuit court to determine whether the discharge constitutes a violation of this subsection. If the court finds that a violation has occurred, the court may enter an order against the employer requiring reinstatement of the employee and may fine the employer in an amount not to exceed one hundred fifty dollars. Further, the court may enter judgment against the employer for the back wages, costs, attorney's fees, and for the amount of child support which should have been withheld and paid over during the period of time the employee was wrongfully discharged.

11. If an obligor for whom an order to withhold has been issued pursuant to subsection 1 of this section terminates the obligor's employment, the employer shall, within ten days of the termination, notify the division of the termination, shall provide to the division the last known address of the obligor, if known to the employer, and shall provide to the division the name and

address of the obligor's new employer, if known. When the division determines the identity of the obligor's new employer, the director shall issue an order to the new employer as provided in subsection 1 of this section.

12. If an employer or other payor is withholding amounts for more than one order issued pursuant to subsection 1 of this section, the employer or other payor may transmit all such withholdings which are to be remitted to the same circuit clerk, other collection unit or to the payment center after October 1, 1999, as one payment together with a separate list identifying obligors for whom a withholding has been made and the amount withheld from each obligor so listed, and the withholding date or dates for each obligor.

13. For purposes of this section, "income" means any periodic form of payment due to an individual, regardless of source, including wages, salaries, commissions, bonuses, workers' compensation benefits, disability benefits, payments pursuant to a pension or a retirement program, and interest.

14. The employer shall withhold funds as directed in the notice, except if an employer receives an income withholding order issued by another state, the employer shall apply the income withholding law of the state of the obligor's principal place of employment in determining:

- (1) The employer's fee for processing an income withholding order;
- (2) The maximum amount permitted to be withheld from the obligor's income;
- (3) The time periods within which the employer shall implement the income withholding order and forward the child support payments;
- (4) The priorities for withholding and allocating income withheld for multiple child support obligees; and
- (5) Any withholding terms and conditions not specified in the order.

15. If the secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services promulgates a final standard format for an employer income withholding notice, the director shall use such notice prescribed by the secretary.