



MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

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A Weekly Column for the
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Mediating Family Disputes, Expanding Cell Phone Coverage

JEFFERSON CITY – Legislation I am sponsoring would help families resolve disputes by arbitration rather than going through a confrontational court hearing. Senate Bill 395 was presented to the Senate Judiciary and Civil and Criminal Jurisprudence Committee this week.

The legislation allows any circuit court that has not established a family court to assess a thirty-dollar surcharge in all proceedings which would typically be heard in family court. These issues include the dissolution or annulment of marriage, legal separation, child custody disputes, adoption proceedings, juvenile proceedings and child support enforcement.

Money generated by the surcharge will be used to fund an alternative dispute resolution program in jurisdictions that do not have family courts. Family members would sit down with a mediator and try to resolve their disputes, rather than going through the court system.

This approach will allow family members to settle their differences peacefully, in a more relaxed atmosphere, guided by a specialist in alternative dispute resolutions. The family mediation session also would be less expensive than trying to resolve the issue through the courts.

A two-year pilot program established by the Missouri Supreme Court has proven very successful. The pilot program involved a three-circuit area that includes Barton, Benton, Cedar, Dallas, Henry, Hickory, Polk and St. Clair counties in the 28th Senate District. The commission supervising the program found it increased public awareness and use of alternative dispute resolution services, that mediation is effective in resolving family disputes, that parties who reached mediated agreements are highly likely to follow the terms of the agreements, and that participants were highly satisfied with the mediation process.

I also am sponsoring a resolution designed to improve wireless telecommunication services to rural areas of Missouri. Senate Concurrent Resolution 10 calls on the public service commission to ease the application requirements for wireless telecommunications companies wishing to provide service to rural areas.

Anyone who has tried to use their cell phone while traveling through a rural area knows how frustrating it can be to lose a signal during an important call. And in many rural areas of the state, cell phones and other wireless devices are simply not an option.

SCR 10 will allow the public service commission to set up a method to certify telecommunication service providers as “eligible telecommunication carriers.” Carriers certified as eligible would then be able to tap into the universal service fund to develop the necessary infrastructure to provide wireless telecom services to rural areas.

The proposal was presented to the Senate Rules, Joint Rules, Resolutions and Ethics Committee this week and awaits a committee vote before moving to the Senate floor.

If you have questions or comments about this or any other issue, please feel free to contact me at 573-751-8793 or by e-mail at: delbertscott@senate.state.mo.us

Senator Delbert Scott represents the people of Barton, Benton, Cedar, Dallas, Henry, Hickory, Pettis, Polk and St. Clair counties in the Missouri Senate.