



MISSOURI SENATE
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Senate Gives Final Approval to Sen. Smith's Criminal Non-Support Bill

Measure Heads to Governor to be Signed into Law

JEFFERSON CITY — Legislation sponsored by Sen. Jeff Smith, D-St. Louis, changing state law regarding criminal non-support, has passed both legislative chambers and is on its way to the governor's desk. The Missouri House yesterday (4/28) gave final approval to [Senate Bill 140](#) allowing courts dealing with criminal non-support cases to assign nonviolent defendants to educational, vocational, or job training, substance abuse treatment or work programs. Defendants participating in the alternative sentencing program could have criminal penalties dismissed, reduced, or modified if they successfully complete court-ordered treatment or training programs and make child support payments.

"We want to give struggling parents an opportunity to return to the workforce and ultimately reconnect with their children," said Smith. "If we just lock them up, no one wins—they can't pay child support from jail, and when they re-enter society, their record makes it tough to find a job. But if we can help them with vocational training and job training services, they're far more likely to be able to fulfill their obligations."

The legislation will allow courts the flexibility—under certain circumstances—to place nonviolent defendants incarcerated for criminal support on work release to satisfy their child support obligations if they meet criteria established by the Department of Corrections. A defendant placed on parole and ordered to begin support payments who has failed to do so could potentially have his parole revoked and receive an appropriate sentence.

"These proposals were inspired by the Fathers' Support Center in St. Louis, which does incredible work to help men get their lives back on track," Smith said. "They will bring much-needed relief to an overburdened criminal justice system, provide alternatives to help parents reconnect with their kids, and save the state over a million dollars annually."

Fathering Court is an alternative to prosecution and incarceration for men with child support debt. The program increases the number of fathers that contribute financially and emotionally to their children by helping men successfully overcome their challenges. The longest-running court is in Jackson County, Missouri, and since its creation in 1998 has become a model for others across the country.

"Nearly 500 men have participated in Fathering Court since 1998, and the graduates have made nearly \$3 million in child support payments," said Smith. "Clearly, this innovative program should be expanded, and we should eliminate the modern-day form of debtor's prison."

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