



State Senator

Robin Wright-Jones

District 5



Column For Week of: March 30, 2009

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Bringing Missouri's Paternity Law Into the 21st Century

A bill that addresses our state's out-dated paternity law is making its way through the Missouri Senate. [Senate Bill 141](#), a bill I have signed on to co-sponsor, addresses the growing problem of mistaken paternity, which occurs all too often across our state. According to the [Department of Social Services – Family Support Division](#), approximately 34,000 children were born out of wedlock in our state in 2008 (equaling 40 percent of all births).

In many cases, a paternity test is required to establish who fathered a child. Sometimes, this process can release the man who was thought to be the child's father from parental responsibilities, or so they thought. Unfortunately, our state laws have not caught up with the advances of DNA technology. If a man contests that he is not the child's father, and even has DNA testing to prove that he did not father the child, there are instances when this individual is still unable to receive justice in a court of law.

This problem causes a major roadblock in this man's life. He cannot force the mother to produce the child for DNA testing, he is unable to have his child support eliminated, he cannot get any convictions resulting from criminal non-support eliminated from his record, and his requests are denied to have the child's birth certificate altered — removing his name from the documentation.

The [Father Support Center](#) in St. Louis brought this important issue before the General Assembly. Created in 1997, this organization works with the [Department of Social Services](#) to assist Missouri families by helping non-custodial fathers become responsible parents who are committed to creating positive family relationships.

I wish all of my colleagues in the General Assembly could have listened to the emotionally-moving testimony the [Senate General Laws Committee](#) heard while considering Senate Bill 141. A Missouri father testified before lawmakers that he has

been paying child support for decades for a child that was established by DNA testing as not his own. He was paying for this child because he could not get a judge to overturn his original judgment handed out so many years ago, despite the DNA testing results.

With initial passage in the Senate, lawmakers are sending a strong and clear message to our state's court system. Men should not have to pay child support for a child who has been proven by DNA testing to be not their own. With the governor's signature on this important piece of legislation, my colleagues and I would finally right a wrong that has gone on for far too long in our state.

To find out more information about the legislation mentioned in this column or other matters involving state government, please feel free to contact my office at (573) 751-2606.

*Senator Robin Wright-Jones represents a portion of
St. Louis City in the Missouri Senate.*



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