

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 4

WHEREAS, over one-half of all IV-D caseloads in Missouri are low-income families who rely on child support for up to one-quarter of their total income. Unfortunately, the noncustodial parent responsible for providing these payments are often too poor to support themselves much less fulfill a child support order; and

WHEREAS, low-income noncustodial fathers are a particularly disadvantaged group. In addition to being low-skilled and low-educated, they often have criminal records and suffer from many poverty-related problems such as poor health. All of these characteristics are barriers to finding high-paying jobs; and

WHEREAS, federal, state, and local child support agencies have attempted to increase compliance among these fathers in two ways: lowering child support orders to better meet ability to pay and addressing the underlying reasons for nonpayment by connecting low-income parents to employment services; and

WHEREAS, lowering child support orders is successful in increasing compliance, it results in significantly lower payments to poor families; and

WHEREAS, one way to assure that low-income noncustodial parents receive the attention they need is to establish separate child support dockets known as "Fathering Courts"; and

WHEREAS, Fathering Courts are an innovative alternative to prosecution and incarceration for men with significant child support arrearages. The program increases the number of fathers that contribute financially and emotionally to their children and helps men successfully overcome the challenges that have led to their nonpayment of child support; and

WHEREAS, the longest-running Fathering Court is in Jackson County, Missouri, and since its creation in 1998 has increased child support collections by more than \$2 million. The Jackson County Fathering Court has become a model for others across the country; and

WHEREAS, the Jackson County Fathering Court is designed to give noncustodial parents the tools to become financially and emotionally responsible for their children. Parents are educated, counseled, and encouraged to place the needs of their children first; and

WHEREAS, by emphasizing the needs of the children, the Fathering Court seeks to promote the well-being of potentially thousands of children who are involved in the state's child support enforcement system; and

WHEREAS, the Fathering Court addresses alcohol, drug, employment, and mental health issues that affect some fathers who face child support charges; and

WHEREAS, the success of Fathering Courts depends heavily upon judicial support and initiative. After a father is arrested for failure to pay child support, he is screened to ensure that he does not have any other serious felonies and then the Fathering Court process begins. Fathers stay in the program until they have worked through their issues and resumed paying child support; and

WHEREAS, more than 429 men have participated in the Fathering Court since 1998. To date, Fathering Court graduates have contributed more than \$2.7 million in child support payments. In addition, pre- and post-evaluations indicate that men who graduated from Fathering Court have significantly more contact with their children, increased interaction with their child's mother about their child's development, and pay their child support:

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED by the members of the Missouri Senate, Ninety-fifth General Assembly, First Regular Session, the House of Representatives concurring therein, that in order to ensure thoughtful and necessary changes are made to the state's child support enforcement system in order to increase the number of noncustodial parents participating in the financial and emotional needs of their children, the General Assembly must comprehensively study and reform the system; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the President Pro Tempore of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives appoint a Joint Interim Committee on Child Support Enforcement Reform that is authorized to function during the legislative interim between the First Regular Session of the Ninety-fifth General Assembly and the Second Regular Session of the Ninety-fifth General Assembly to study and make recommendations regarding a reform of the state's child support enforcement system, including a study of the Fathering Court in Jackson County as a model for the entire state; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Joint Interim Committee shall prepare a final report, together with its recommendations for any legislative action deemed necessary for submission to the General Assembly prior to commencement of the Second Regular Session of the Ninety-fifth General Assembly; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Joint Interim Committee may solicit input and information necessary to fulfill its obligations, including but not limited to soliciting input and information from any state department or agency the Joint Interim Committee deems relevant, child advocates, the courts, and the general public; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the staffs of Senate Research, the Joint Committee on Legislative Research, and House Research shall provide such legal, research, clerical, technical, and bill drafting services as the Joint Interim Committee may require in the performance of its duties; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the actual and necessary expenses of the Joint Interim Committee, its members, and any staff assigned to the Joint Interim Committee incurred by the Joint Interim Committee shall be paid by the Joint Contingent Fund.