

HB 355 -- PROTECTION OF CHILDREN

SPONSOR: Davidson

This bill changes the age a person is considered a child, as it pertains to multiple provisions in the bill, to anyone under the age of 18 instead of 17. A missing child can also include a person still in foster care regardless of their age.

The bill requires law enforcement agencies to take a missing child report from any member of the family support team, as defined in this bill, and provide a copy of the report to the agency or placement provider with legal custody of the missing child. The agency or placement provider shall maintain all copies of missing child reports for any child under its legal custody. Within 72 hours of a missing child complaint being filed for a child placed in an authorized agency or foster care or within 72 hours of an authorized agency or foster care being notified that a child under its custody is missing, whichever event first occurs, the family support team, as defined in this bill, shall hold a meeting to discuss the whereabouts of the missing child and to discuss the initial decision regarding the custody and placement of the missing child once the child is found. There is also a penalty provision for any agency or placement provider with legal custody of a child who goes missing but fails to comply with these provisions. Failure to comply will cause the agency or placement provider to be liable to any injured party, which includes the missing child, parent, foster parent, or legal guardian of the missing child, and the state of Missouri, and is subject to a civil penalty of \$50,000 (Sections 210.762, 43.401, and 210.762, RSMo).

This bill also waives driver's license fees and non-driver's license fees for verified homeless youths or unaccompanied youths. It also specifies who may verify the person's status as a homeless youth (Sections 136.055, 302.178, and 302.181).

Currently, the Department of Health and Senior Services is required to maintain a record of substantiated, signed parental complaints against licensed child care facilities and make those available to the public. This bill gives the responsibility to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education instead of DHSS and specifies that the complaints being made available to the public should not divulge any information that can identify the reporters (Section 210.203).

This bill also requires case workers to notify a juvenile officer if a child under their supervision goes missing or is suspected to be on the run. Once notified, the juvenile officer shall file with the court a notice in the child's case file that states the child

is missing and include any other relevant information, which shall include the missing child report. If the missing child is found, the juvenile officer shall file with the court a notice in the child's case file that the child has been found and include any other relevant information (Section 210.795).