

HB 615 -- JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS

SPONSOR: Coleman

Currently, a statement made by a child under the age of 14 that would otherwise be inadmissible in court, including a visual and an aural recording of a verbal or nonverbal statement of that child, is admissible in court in matters relating to offenses under Chapter 565, 566, 568, or 573, RSMo. This bill changes the age to children under 18. The bill also adds that a visual and an aural recording of a verbal or nonverbal statement of a "vulnerable person", as defined in the bill, is also admissible when relating to an offense under Chapter 565, 566, 568, or 573.

This bill also modifies the offense of enticement of a child by increasing the age of the victim from less than 15 years old to less than 17 years old.

Additionally, the bill modifies the penalty provisions for the offense of patronizing prostitution. Currently, the penalty distinctions are for victims older than 14 years of age and 14 or younger. This bill increases the age from 14 to 15 years old and modifies the offense of patronizing prostitution if the individual being patronized is 15 years of age or younger from a class D felony to a class B felony.

This bill provides that a person who pled guilty to or was found guilty of certain sexual offenses as specified in the bill will be required to pay \$5,000 in restitution payable to the State to be deposited into the newly established "Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation Fund". Upon receipt of money from the Fund, a county must allocate disbursement of the funds according to the requirements in the bill.

This bill establishes the "Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation Fund". The moneys in the Fund will be distributed to the county where the human trafficking offense occurred.

The county will allocate 50% of the moneys to rehabilitation of human trafficking victims and 50% of the moneys to education programs for convicted human trafficking offenders and to increase the number of law enforcement officers to enforce human trafficking laws.

This bill is the same as HB 1539 and HB 1541 (2024) and similar to HB 453 (2023).