

COMMITTEE OF ORIGIN: Standing Committee on Children and Families

This bill designates the month of June as "Fathership Month" in Missouri, encouraging events and activities to raise awareness about the importance of fathers being a part of their children's lives.

Additionally, the bill establishes within the Department of Social Services the "Missouri Fathership Project", to promote fathership and empower fathers to become successful in fathership.

The bill establishes the "Missouri Fathership Project Grant Program", which is a program and accompanying fund for family-focused community agencies, faith-based agencies, family advocacy programs, and nonprofit organizations to apply for in order to hire, train, and facilitate fathership project specialists, who are to serve as a point of contact for fathers who want to reestablish and strengthen relationships with their children. When participating in the Project, fathers are eligible for limited driving privileges and are not subject to suspension or revocation of hunting and fishing licenses, as well as professional or occupational licenses.

The bill specifies the duties of fathership project specialists, including, but not limited to, being dispatched to engage with a father who does not comply with a visitation and custody order, at which point a court or the division is required to issue a referral to a partnering entity utilizing services from a fathership project specialist.

Current law sets provisions for circumstances in which a court can grant reasonable visitation rights for grandparents and provides that if the natural parents of a child are legally married and living together with a child, a grandparent is unable to file for visitation.

This bill adds to those circumstances to include situations where the parents of the child were never married and the parent with custodial rights has denied reasonable visitation and repeals the prohibition for a grandparent to file for visitation if both parents are naturally married and living together with the child.

Furthermore, if a grandparent has been denied reasonable visitation for a period greater than 60 days and an action involving custody or visitation has already been adjudicated, the grandparent can file seeking visitation with the child, and additionally has the right to file a motion for an independent action if there is no

prior custody or visitation order and reasonable visitation has been denied. Visitation provided to a grandparent after filing an action under this section will not terminate a grandparent's right to seek relief. If the parties reach an agreement regarding grandparent visitation, the court can enter an order confirming such agreement if the agreement is found to be in the best interest of the child.