

HB 1441 -- DUTIES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

SPONSOR: Gragg

This bill requires the Department of Social Services to annually submit three reports pertaining to goal four of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, which is the goal that encourages the formation and maintenance of two-parent families. The three reports are as follows:

- (1) Actions taken by the Department in the last three years to implement goal four, those actions taken and contemplated to increase the future utilization of goal four, and year-over-year growth in the utilization of goal four;
- (2) The Department's coordination with other state agencies to identify policies that negatively impact two-parent family formation or maintenance, with specific attention to the criminal justice system; and
- (3) The ways in which current child support guidelines contribute to an obligor being unable to adequately sustain his or her own living expenses, the ways in which current child support enforcement efforts are unnecessarily severe or may cause job loss, descent into the underground economy, or a damaged relationship with the obligor's child, the extent to which current guidelines exceed the marginal cost of the child's presence in the support recipient's household or otherwise includes disguised alimony, the extent to which current guidelines contribute to the accumulation of uncollectible arrearages, and steps that may be taken to reduce these accumulations.

The bill establishes, within the Department, the Office of Fatherhood and sets provisions for staff size, the head of the Office, and funding sources, and designates the office's duty as assessing the programs, policies, and procedures of each state department to gauge their impact on fatherhood.

The Office is required to submit an annual report to the General Assembly and the Governor detailing the office's past activities, future plans, existing barriers to father participation and equality, plans for removing those barriers, and any legislative action necessary to support fatherhood and to otherwise encourage two-parent family formation or maintenance.

The Office is also required to submit an additional report by December 1, 2026, to the General Assembly and Governor after reviewing judicial decisions and administrative actions to assess compliance with certain provisions of statute governing domestic

relations, including child custody determinations and child support enforcement actions.

This bill requires the Department to partner with organizations in this state to offer grants to implement programs encouraging two-parent family formation and maintenance as well as two-parent reunification. The programs are required to focus on marriage education, marriage and relationship skills, public and coparent skills workshops, public awareness campaigns on the value of marriage and responsible fatherhood, premarital counseling, couples counseling, shared parenting mediation, family reconciliation, court-ordered counseling at the beginning of divorce proceedings, school programs, community organization programs, counseling and legal assistance in cases of parental alienation, and family reunification assistance for released prisoners.

The Department is required to ensure that a similar portion of TANF funds are proportionally allocated among all four stated goals of the program, as well as file any waivers or changes to the Department's state plan.