



MISSOURI HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WITNESS APPEARANCE FORM

BILL NUMBER: HB 243		DATE: 1/28/2025
COMMITTEE: Children and Families		
TESTIFYING: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> IN SUPPORT OF <input type="checkbox"/> IN OPPOSITION TO <input type="checkbox"/> FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES		
WITNESS NAME		
INDIVIDUAL:		
WITNESS NAME: ANGELA MURILLO		PHONE NUMBER:
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY:		STATE: ZIP:
EMAIL: angela.chaidez@gmail.com	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 1/26/2025 5:11 PM
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WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: ARNIE C. "HONEST-ABE" DIENOFF-STATE PUBLIC ADVOCATE		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL: arniedienoff@yahoo.com	ATTENDANCE: In-Person		SUBMIT DATE: 1/28/2025 11:46 PM
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WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: BEATRICE CHURCH		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL: beatrice.churchmo@gmail.com	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 1/27/2025 2:58 PM	
THE INFORMATION ON THIS FORM IS PUBLIC RECORD UNDER CHAPTER 610, RSMo.			

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of HB 243 and HB 280. My name is Beatrice Church, and I am here to advocate for the Deaf women who are disproportionately harmed by the prohibition on dissolving marriages during pregnancy. The prohibition on dissolving a marriage during pregnancy creates significant harm, especially for Deaf women. Many Deaf individuals face barriers to accessing critical resources, such as legal assistance, shelters, or counseling services. These barriers are amplified by communication challenges, a lack of interpreters, and systemic inequities that often leave Deaf women isolated in situations of domestic abuse, neglect, or financial instability. By preventing the dissolution of marriage during pregnancy, the current law traps women, including Deaf women, in harmful environments. Instead of being able to prioritize their health and safety and prepare for the arrival of their child, they are forced to remain in legally binding relationships that may perpetuate trauma and limit their access to independence. This bill is not about undermining the significance of marriage or family; it is about giving pregnant women the path to make decisions that are in their best interest and the best interest of their unborn child. Deaf women are often impacted because they often lack immediate access to resources like legal aid due to communication barriers. I urge you to consider the real-life implications of this bill. It provides a pathway for women to take control of their lives and ensure they are not left in a vulnerable situation during one of the most critical times of their lives. For Deaf women, who already face so many obstacles, this bill would mean protection, autonomy, and the opportunity to build a safer future for themselves and their children. Thank you for your time and consideration. I strongly urge you to support HB 243 and HB 280. Sincerely Beatrice Church



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WITNESS NAME			
REGISTERED LOBBYIST:			
WITNESS NAME: ELLIE BLEDSOE		PHONE NUMBER: 314-531-7526	
REPRESENTING: PLANNED PARENTHOOD GREAT RIVERS ACTION		TITLE: INTERIM VICE PRESIDENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS	
ADDRESS: 4251 FOREST PARK AVE			
CITY: ST. LOUIS		STATE: MO	ZIP: 63108
EMAIL: ellie.bledsoe@ppgr.org	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 1/28/2025 1:05 PM	
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WITNESS NAME		
INDIVIDUAL:		
WITNESS NAME: EMILY STOINSKI		PHONE NUMBER:
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY:		STATE: ZIP:
EMAIL: emilysto@rocketmail.com	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 1/28/2025 7:42 AM
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As a former domestic violence case worker, I saw first hand how pregnancy could deeply impact a victim trying to leave an abusive relationship. It was not uncommon for me to hear victims say that the abuse, often physical and sexual abuse, became worst and more dangerous the moment their partner found out they were pregnant. I have safety planned with victims who are terrified they will become pregnant with their husband's child, knowing that they will never be able to leave easily or quickly if they become pregnant. I will never forget the chilling story once shared with me of a victim who had left her abusive dating partner and had moved into a healthy relationship, but when she found out that she was pregnant by her new partner, she responded, referencing the previous partner, "he is going to kill me." He would later go on to do just that. This change in the divorce law ensures that victims who know their partners, know their own dangerous situation are able to get their divorce finalized in order to get and find further safety and separation. Additionally, it benefits husbands and other non-pregnant people seeking divorces, because they may be unsafe in the relationship, therefore they seek their own divorce. It benefits all Missourians to remove this barrier and ensure that all individuals regardless of pregnancy are able to obtain the divorce they may need to save their life.



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WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: JESSICA DEVOTO		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL: jessicadevoto@gmail.com	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 1/27/2025 5:47 PM	
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Dear Members of the Missouri Legislature, My name is Jessica DeVoto. I am writing to express my strong support for House Bill 243, which would allow judges to enter a judgment of dissolution of marriage or legal separation regardless of a party's pregnancy status. This bill represents a necessary and compassionate step toward ensuring the rights, autonomy, and well-being of all Missourians. Current law prevents individuals from finalizing a divorce if one party is pregnant, ostensibly to protect the interests of the unborn child. Although well-intentioned, this legal barrier can have significant negative consequences. It forces individuals to remain legally bound to one another during a highly sensitive and stressful time, which may be particularly harmful in cases of abuse, conflict, or irreconcilable differences. It is not uncommon for abusive partners to impregnate their spouse with the intention of trapping them in the marriage. HB243 acknowledges that the end of a marriage should not be contingent on pregnancy, especially when the emotional, financial, and physical health of one or both parties may be at stake. Moreover, allowing dissolution of marriage or legal separation while one party is pregnant does not diminish the importance of ensuring proper care and responsibility for the child. Issues of custody, child support, and parenting plans can still be addressed through the courts as needed. This bill simply removes an unnecessary and outdated barrier that disproportionately impacts women and undermines personal agency during an already challenging life event. As someone who believes strongly in the importance of individual autonomy, family stability, and justice, I urge you to vote in favor of HB243. This bill is a compassionate, pragmatic, and necessary reform that reflects the realities faced by many Missouri families. Thank you for your attention to this important matter. Sincerely, Jessica DeVoto



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WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: JOY DAGGS		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL: joydaggs@hotmail.com	ATTENDANCE: Written		SUBMIT DATE: 1/26/2025 8:52 PM
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This bill is long overdue. Women who are in violent marriages should not have to have to risk their lives for the duration of a pregnancy simply because of an archaic law. Also, even if women are not in violent marriages, if they are in a situation of infidelity, they should be able to leave the marriage on their own accord. It is time to move forward as a state and support women!



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WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: KORTNIE HUDDLESTON		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL: kortniehuddleston@gmail.com		ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 1/28/2025 7:47 PM

THE INFORMATION ON THIS FORM IS PUBLIC RECORD UNDER CHAPTER 610, RSMo.

I am writing to urge your support for HB243 (Williams) and HB280 (Proudie), which seek to allow courts to grant a judgment of dissolution of marriage or legal separation for pregnant individuals. Currently, in Missouri, a pregnant person or their spouse can file for divorce, but the divorce cannot be finalized until after the child is born. This delay can have devastating consequences, particularly in cases involving intimate partner violence. Tragically, homicide is the leading cause of death for pregnant women in the United States, with pregnant women more likely to be murdered during pregnancy or shortly after childbirth than to die from obstetric complications. Many of these preventable deaths are linked to the dangerous intersection of intimate partner violence and access to firearms. Preventing a pregnant person from divorcing an abusive spouse often exacerbates the risk of preterm birth and other pregnancy-related complications. Studies show that intimate partner violence increases the likelihood of delayed or missed prenatal care, as abusive partners may restrict their spouses from leaving the home or the victims may avoid appointments due to fear or visible injuries. Intimate partner violence during pregnancy is also associated with higher rates of preterm labor, low birth weight, miscarriage, and abortion. The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence reports that about 25% of women who experience physical or sexual abuse by a partner also face reproductive coercion, which includes tactics like sabotaging contraception or marital rape to force pregnancy. This strategy is often used by abusive partners to trap their spouses in violent relationships, particularly in states like Missouri where divorce cannot be finalized during pregnancy. Missouri's current laws create a dangerous situation: pregnant individuals cannot finalize divorces, abusers convicted of misdemeanor domestic violence retain access to firearms, and abortion is banned. This combination puts lives at risk. HB243 and HB280 are critical steps toward addressing these issues, and I strongly urge you to support these vital measures.



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WITNESS NAME		
INDIVIDUAL:		
WITNESS NAME: KRISTA KIRN		PHONE NUMBER:
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY:		STATE: ZIP:
EMAIL: kristakirn@gmail.com	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 1/26/2025 12:19 PM
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I have a very good friend who was not allowed to get a divorce while she was pregnant. Her husband admitted having affairs. This is a clear violation of individual freedom of choice.



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WITNESS NAME		
REGISTERED LOBBYIST:		
WITNESS NAME: MAGGIE OLIVIA EDMONDSON		PHONE NUMBER:
REPRESENTING: ABORTION ACTION MISSOURI		TITLE:
ADDRESS: 1210 S VANDEVENTER AVE		
CITY: ST. LOUIS		STATE: MO
		ZIP: 63110
EMAIL: maggie@abortionactionmissouri.org	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 1/28/2025 8:00 AM
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WITNESS NAME		
INDIVIDUAL:		
WITNESS NAME: MARISSA POLZIN		PHONE NUMBER:
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY:		STATE: ZIP:
EMAIL: ritmeyer03@gmail.com	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 1/26/2025 10:24 AM
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As someone who was denied the ability to divorce in 2013 as the result of being pregnant, you are putting women in dangerous situations or keep them duck in abusive marriages. The leading killer of pregnant women is murder by the father. Women need to ability to get a divorce while pregnant.



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WITNESS NAME			
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION:			
WITNESS NAME: MATTHEW HUFFMAN		PHONE NUMBER: 888-666-1911	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME: MISSOURI COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE		TITLE: CHIEF PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER	
ADDRESS: 217 OSCAR DR. SUITE A			
CITY: JEFFERSON CITY		STATE: MO	ZIP: 65101
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE:	SUBMIT DATE: 1/28/2025 12:00 AM	
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WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: MICHAEL		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL: libertytree.cottage976@passinbox.com		ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 1/28/2025 9:35 AM
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I SUPPORT HB 243 as originally filed.



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WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: MICHAEL DREYER		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL: mdreyer93@gmail.com		ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 1/28/2025 7:44 PM

THE INFORMATION ON THIS FORM IS PUBLIC RECORD UNDER CHAPTER 610, RSMo.

I am writing to urge your support for HB243 (Williams) and HB280 (Proudie), which propose enabling the court to issue a judgment of dissolution of marriage or legal separation for pregnant individuals. Presently, in Missouri, a pregnant individual or their spouse can initiate divorce proceedings, but the divorce cannot be finalized until after the birth of the child. Tragically, homicide ranks as the leading cause of death among pregnant women in the US, with a higher likelihood of women being murdered during pregnancy or shortly after childbirth compared to the leading obstetric causes of maternal death. A significant portion of these preventable homicides are linked to the deadly combination of intimate partner violence and firearms. Denying a pregnant person the ability to divorce an abusive spouse often heightens the risk of preterm birth and other pregnancy complications. Research indicates that intimate partner violence increases the likelihood of delayed or nonexistent prenatal care, either because abusive partners prevent pregnant spouses from leaving their homes or because fear of abuse or evidence of injuries discourages pregnant individuals from attending appointments. Intimate partner violence during pregnancy is also associated with increased rates of preterm labor, low birth weight, miscarriage, and abortion. According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, approximately 25% of women experiencing physical or sexual abuse from their partners also report reproductive coercion, which involves being forced into pregnancy through various means such as sabotaging contraception or marital rape. This tactic is frequently employed by abusive partners to trap their spouses in violent relationships, particularly in states like Missouri where finalizing divorce during pregnancy is prohibited. The current legal landscape in Missouri poses a perilous situation. Pregnant individuals are unable to finalize divorces, abusive partners convicted of misdemeanor domestic abuse retain firearm rights, and abortion is outlawed. This combination jeopardizes the lives of Missourians. HB243 and HB280 represent a crucial step towards rectifying these issues, and I implore you to lend your support to these important measures.



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WITNESS NAME		
INDIVIDUAL:		
WITNESS NAME: SUSAN GIBSON		PHONE NUMBER:
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY:		STATE: ZIP:
EMAIL: Onesuegibson@protonmail.com	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 1/26/2025 12:17 PM
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WITNESS NAME		
INDIVIDUAL:		
WITNESS NAME: TAYLOR FULLER		PHONE NUMBER:
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY:		STATE: ZIP:
EMAIL: tamsden642@icloud.com	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 1/26/2025 3:05 PM

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It's about time that pregnancy status does not dictate a couple's decision to divorce. No child benefits from being born into a failing marriage. Children do not fix rifts that were there before they were born.



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WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: TIRSA WOODSON		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL: tearsa1@yahoo.com	ATTENDANCE: Written		SUBMIT DATE: 1/28/2025 7:19 AM
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I have been beaten, body slammed, and kicked my down the stairs, while 4 months pregnant. My life and unborn child's life was threatened, I will be murdered. I have the right to choose to leave this marriage alive so my unborn child can strive on the inside and live it's life unharmed. To deny my petition for dissolution of marriage or legal separation means you have given me and my child a death sentence.



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WITNESS NAME		
INDIVIDUAL:		
WITNESS NAME: JOSHUA WILCUTT		PHONE NUMBER:
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY:		STATE: ZIP:
EMAIL: joshua.wilcutt@live.com	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 1/27/2025 10:44 PM
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I beleive this legislation as it stands needs to be modified. In Missouri, husband's are presumed to be the childs father. In cases of infidelity, this would could cause issues forcing a man to pay support for a child that is not theirs. If the woman receives any benefit from the state, the state in would move to garnish the man's wages, even if the woman clarifys the child is not the husband's. For this reason I oppose this Bill. I beleive clarity is needed in this bill to protect husband's from any adverse actions in the cases of infidelity.



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WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: BRIDGETTE DUNLAP		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL: bridgettedunlap@gmail.com		ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 1/27/2025 4:08 PM
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I am a lawyer and journalist who has researched and written about the ability of pregnant parties to divorce in Missouri and throughout the country. I believe that, as currently drafted, the identical bills HB 243, HB 280, HB 848, and SB 93 would harm the people their sponsors seek to protect. First, the bill maintains and seemingly endorses the dangerous and unnecessary requirement in 452.310 that a divorce petition state “whether the wife is pregnant.” This is a requirement adopted by Missouri and many other states in the 1970s with the intent of ensuring that divorcing fathers would support future children of the marriage. However, it is not necessary to require this disclosure at the filing stage. Approximately half of U.S. states do not do so. Requiring disclosure of pregnancy in order to start the divorce process is dangerous for those experiencing or at risk of domestic violence. Pregnancy increases one’s risk of being a victim of homicide significantly. Furthermore, this requirement has been widely misinterpreted by the media and women who were deterred from leaving abusive marriages to mean either that pregnant women can’t even file for divorce or that Missouri law bars judges from finalizing a divorce during pregnancy regardless of the circumstances. Second, the bill’s bar to considering pregnancy status will harm pregnant parties. For most pregnant individuals, it will be to their benefit to wait to finalize a divorce so that paternity, custody, and child support obligations can be established. Putting in law that pregnancy “shall not prevent the court from entering a judgment” gives a husband who wants the divorce granted immediately the ability to force his wife to come back to court later to address his child support obligations. It will also cause the pregnant party to lose her health insurance if she is on her husband’s plan. There is no provision of Missouri law that bars a judge from granting a divorce decree to a pregnant party when warranted. Indeed, I am aware of cases in which Missouri judges have done so. My understanding from conversations with divorce practitioners is that some judges are uncomfortable using their discretion under current law to grant divorces during pregnancy and lawyers are hesitant to ask them. The solution to this problem is not to limit judges’ existing discretion. A pregnant party may have good reason to want her pregnancy taken into account. The titles of HB 243, HB 280, and HB 848, “Allows the court to enter a judgment of dissolution of marriage or legal separation if a person is pregnant” wrongly suggest that courts are not currently allowed to enter a judgment during pregnancy. This risks exacerbating the problem of judges being disinclined to do so. My approach would be to (1) remove the requirement for disclosure at filing and (2) recognize in a preamble or legislative findings that courts already have the discretion to finalize divorces during pregnancy when warranted. The idea that “pregnant women in Missouri can’t leave abusive husbands” has gone viral. This is a misperception that could get someone killed. I urge the committee to avoid furthering this misunderstanding as you seek a targeted solution to the difficulties pregnant women face when divorcing. For further discussion see Bridgette Dunlap, No, Missouri law does not require a pregnant woman to stay with her husband, Missouri Independent, June 24, 2024; Bridgette Dunlap, We can raise the alarm about bad laws without telling women they are powerless,

Missouri Independent, Sep. 3, 2024.