

Greitens signs Foster Care Bill of Rights into law

Greitens signs Foster Care Bill of Rights into law



In a Thursday morning ceremony at the Central Missouri Foster Care & Adoption Association's office in Jefferson City, Gov. Eric Greitens signed the Foster Care Bill of Rights into law, which makes changes to the state's child protection laws.

Missouri law now includes a Foster Care Bill of Rights.

In a Thursday morning ceremony at the Central Missouri Foster Care & Adoption Association's office in Jefferson City, Gov. Eric Greitens signed the bill that includes that language and makes other changes to the state's child protection laws.

"Our state has 13,000 children in the foster care system. They are — both in law and spirit — Missouri's children. Our kids," Greitens said. "We recognize the potential of kids in foster care (and) honor hard-working foster parents."

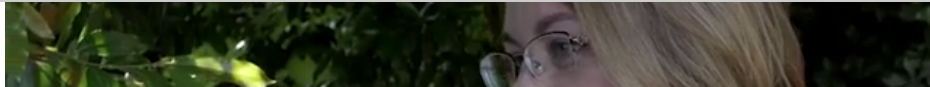
Emily van Schenkhof, deputy director for Missouri Kids First, called the new law "the best bill passed in the 2017 legislative session."

"It was a tough session, and yet, we still found a way to come together to make some important and needed changes for kids," she said.

ADVERTISING

[Learn more](#)

Greitens signs Foster Care Bill of Rights into law



The House passed the final version of the law May 2 by a 136-2 margin, while the Senate cleared the bill May 8 with a 31-1 vote.

The bill says the state Department of Social Services' Children's Division must provide every school-aged foster child — and his or her foster parent — with an age-appropriate orientation and explanation of the bill of rights and make them readily available online.

The law requires every Children's Division office, residential care facility, child-placing agency, or other agency involved in the care and placement of foster children to post the bill of rights in the office, facility or agency.

The law spells out the bill of rights, including:

Making the "best interests of the child" as the Children's Division's first priority.

Supporting a child's return to the custody and care of the parents or guardians with whom the child resided immediately prior to state custody — whenever that's appropriate.

Supporting "the importance of familial stability in foster care and adoption placement."

When returning children to their parents or guardians isn't appropriate or possible, the law tells the Children's Division to "attempt to place the child with suitable relatives" in accordance with an existing state law.

The bill tells the Children's Division to ensure "continuity of foster placement," unless there's a good cause for a change. The division is also to "work with each child in state custody to develop both a permanency plan and a case plan," within 12 months of a child's entrance into state custody.

The bill makes other law changes, too.

"(It) also includes a piece that allows Children's Division to keep 11,000 records that they would have had to destroy if the bill had not been passed," van Schenkhoef noted. "We are able to make the best decisions for kids when we have all the necessary information, and incomplete information puts children's lives at risk."

The bill extends the work of the Legislature's Joint Committee on Child Abuse and Neglect — which was set to expire in January — until January 2023.

Victims of sex trafficking will be added to the state's existing definitions of abuse and neglect.

And the bill adds museums that primarily entertain or educate children under 18 to the list of public places where individuals found guilty of specified offenses against minors are not allowed to visit or loiter within 500 feet.

Van Schenkhoef told the News Tribune: "(The bill) passed because the General Assembly, the governor and advocates worked in partnership, keeping our focus on the needs of children. The bill signing was a moment of grace in what is often a contentious and difficult process."

She also said Missouri Kids First is pleased the governor and first lady Sheena Greitens have made abused children a focus.

"This is a historic and unprecedented opportunity for our state — even more so because the first lady is a public policy expert," she said. "She has the potential to be a game changer for the child welfare system in Missouri."

In his statement about signing the new law, the governor said, "We've got a lot of work to do in Missouri to fight for, work with, and build a better system for our foster families."

SPONSORED CONTENT on News Tribune