

CONFERENCE COMMITTEE REPORT

MR. PRESIDENT and MR. SPEAKER: Your committee on conference on House amendments to **SB 343** submits the following report:

The Senate accedes to all House amendments to the bill, and your committee on conference further agrees to amend the bill as printed with House Committee of the Whole amendments, as follows:

On page 1, following line 8, by inserting:

"New Section 1. (a) The purpose of sections 1 through 3, and amendments thereto, is to protect the best interests of children parented by blind individuals or children who could be parented by blind individuals through the establishment of procedural safeguards that require adherence to the federal Americans with disabilities act of 1990, and respect for the due process and equal protection rights of parents and prospective parents who are blind in the context of child welfare, foster care, family law and adoption.

(b) The legislature hereby finds and declares that:

(1) Blind individuals continue to face unfair, preconceived and unnecessary societal biases as well as antiquated attitudes regarding such individuals' ability to successfully parent their children;

(2) blind individuals face these biases and preconceived attitudes in family and dependency law proceedings where legal custody, residency and parenting time are at stake and in public and private adoption, guardianship and foster care proceedings;

(3) because of these societal biases and antiquated attitudes, children of blind parents are unnecessarily being removed from their parents' care or being restricted from enjoying meaningful time with their parents; and

(4) children are being denied the opportunity to enjoy the experience of living in loving

homes with blind parents or other blind caretakers.

New Sec. 2. As used in sections 1 through 3, and amendments thereto:

(a) "Blind" or "blindness" means a central visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye with the use of a correcting lens. An eye that has a limitation in the field of vision so that the widest diameter of the visual field subtends an angle no greater than 20 degrees is considered to have a central visual acuity of 20/200 or less. The term "blind" or "blindness" includes any degenerative condition that reasonably can be expected to result in blindness.

(b) "Family foster home" means a child care facility that is a private residence, including any adjacent grounds, where a person provides care for 24 hours per day for one or more children in foster care and for which a license is required under K.S.A. 65-501 et seq., and amendments thereto.

(c) "Supportive parenting services" means services, including, but not limited to, services, aids and supports that may assist a parent or prospective parent who is blind in the effective use of non-visual techniques and other alternative methods to enable the parent or prospective parent to discharge parental responsibilities as successfully as a parent who is not blind.

New Sec. 3. (a) In any action brought under article 22 or article 27 of chapter 23 of the Kansas Statutes Annotated, and amendments thereto:

(1) A parent's blindness shall not serve as a basis for denial or restriction of legal custody, residency or parenting time when such legal custody, residency or parenting time is determined to be otherwise in the best interests of the child;

(2) (A) if a parent's blindness is alleged to not be in the best interests of a child, the party asserting such allegation shall have the burden of proving by clear and convincing evidence that the parent's blindness is not in the best interests of the child;

(B) if a party asserting an allegation described in subparagraph (A) has satisfied such party's burden of proof, the blind parent shall have the opportunity to present evidence that, with the implementation of supportive parenting services, placement with such parent is in the best interests of the child; and

(C) the court may issue an order requiring that supportive parenting services be implemented, and the parties may request that the court review the need for continuing such supportive parenting services after a reasonable period of time; and

(3) if a court denies or otherwise restricts a blind parent's request for legal custody, residency or parenting time, the court shall make specific findings of fact stating the basis for its decision, including reasons why the provision of supportive parenting services is not a reasonable accommodation that is required to prevent such denial or restriction.

(b) In any action brought under article 21 of chapter 59 of the Kansas Statutes Annotated, and amendments thereto, a prospective parent's blindness shall not serve as a basis for the denial of such prospective parent's participation in any adoption when such adoption is determined to be otherwise in the best interests of the child.

(c) In any action brought under article 30 of chapter 59 of the Kansas Statutes Annotated, and amendments thereto, an individual's blindness shall not serve as a basis for the denial of such individual's appointment as a guardian when such appointment is determined to be otherwise in the best interests of the child.

(d) An individual's blindness shall not serve as a basis for the denial or restriction of such individual's licensure as a family foster home.

(e) (1) In any action brought under article 22 of chapter 38 of the Kansas Statutes Annotated, and amendments thereto, an individual's blindness shall not serve as a basis for an order of temporary custody, adjudication, disposition, finding of unfitness or termination of

parental rights.

(2) If a court issues an order of temporary custody, adjudication, disposition, finding of unfitness or termination of parental rights that is adverse to an individual who is a party to the proceeding and who is blind, the court shall make specific findings of fact stating the basis for its decision, including reasons why the provision of supportive parenting services is not a reasonable accommodation that is required to prevent such adverse order.";

On page 19, in line 5, by striking "statute book" and inserting "Kansas register";

And by renumbering sections accordingly;

On page 1, in the title, in line 1, by striking "hearing loss" and inserting "disabilities; preserving families that include a parent who is blind; providing for certain considerations relating to cases involving legal custody, residency, parenting time, children in need of care, adoption, foster care and guardianship";

And your committee on conference recommends the adoption of this report.

Conferees on part of House

Conferees on part of Senate