

HOUSE RESOLUTION 39
By DeBerry J

A RESOLUTION Requesting a study of the status and condition of Tennessee children by the Domestic Relations and Family Justice Subcommittees of the House Children and Family Affairs Committee.

WHEREAS, It is incumbent upon the members of this General Assembly to support the development and continued well-being of this state's most treasured natural resource, our children; and

WHEREAS, In January 1997, during the organizational session of the One-Hundredth General Assembly, the Honorable James O. "Jimmy" Naifeh of Tipton County, Speaker of the House of Representatives, made legislative history by creating the first standing committee of the Tennessee General Assembly and the House of Representatives pertaining exclusively to children and families; and

WHEREAS, During the One-Hundredth General Assembly and subsequent sessions, the newly created committee has examined, considered and effectively addressed many difficult, complex bills concerning foster care, juvenile justice, child protective services, responsible fatherhood, parenting, child abandonment, delinquency prevention, divorce, child custody and child support; and

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WHEREAS, The committee has conducted public hearings and inquiries on many issues critical to the health, safety and welfare of Tennessee children and families; and

WHEREAS, The committee has worked persistently and successfully to develop effective lines of communication between the House of Representatives and such entities as the juvenile and family court judges of Tennessee; senior policymakers within the Departments of Children's Services, Human Services and Education, and other professionals whose wisdom, experience and expertise may not have been used in previous legislative sessions; and

WHEREAS, Tennessee's children and families have greatly benefited from the diligence of the Children and Family Affairs Committee and its subcommittees which have served to ease the burden previously placed upon the Judiciary Committee and other standing committees of this House; and

WHEREAS, There are several federal civil rights lawsuits pending which challenge: the adequacy of the state's programs related to Medicaid and TennCare services for children, due process and appeals processes for Medicaid and TennCare children, adoption assistance and foster care services and accounting of social security benefit funds with the majority of these lawsuits focusing on children in state custody; and

WHEREAS, It is appropriate to systematically review state programs and policies related to children in order to develop a more comprehensive approach to the myriad problems of rearing a child in Tennessee; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED SECOND GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, That the Chair of the House Children and Family Affairs Committee is hereby most respectfully requested to instruct the Domestic Relations and Family Affairs Subcommittees of such committee to study the status and condition of Tennessee children in all respects during the interim between the adjournment of the 2001 session of the One Hundred Second General Assembly and the convening of the 2002 session.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That such subcommittees may meet in joint session or individually.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That during deliberations, the subcommittees shall hear testimony and receive counsel and advice from relevant parties and entities including, but not limited to, the following parties:

Tennessee judges with jurisdiction for child and family matters;

The Tennessee Bar Association;

The Department of Children's Services;

The Department of Human Services;

The Department of Health; and

Child advocacy groups, such groups to be designated by the Chairs of the Subcommittees.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That all appropriate state agencies shall provide assistance to the subcommittees upon request of the Chairs of the Subcommittees.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That if such study is authorized, the Domestic Relations and Family Affairs Subcommittees shall timely report their findings and recommendations, including any proposed legislation, to the Chair of the House Children and Family Affairs Committee, to the Speaker of the House of Representatives of the One Hundred Second General Assembly and to the Governor no later than February 1, 2002.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That all legislative members of the subcommittees who are duly elected members of the General Assembly shall remain members of such committee until the committee reports its findings and recommendations to the General Assembly.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That any joint session of the subcommittees shall be convened by the chair of the subcommittee with the most years of continuous service in the General Assembly; in the event the subcommittees meet separately, each shall be convened by the chair of such subcommittee.