

**Committee on Children, Families,
And Elder Affairs**

CS/HB 197 — Servicemembers Civil Relief Act

by Local, Federal and Veterans Affairs Subcommittee and Rep. Payne and others (CS/SB 604 by Judiciary Committee and Senator Bean)

The bill amends current child welfare laws to address the federal Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA) to protect the rights of a parent, legal custodian or caregiver responsible for a child's welfare who, because of his or her military service, must be absent from his or her child or from child welfare related court proceedings.

The bill amends the definition of the term "abandoned" or "abandonment" in ch. 39, F.S., to prohibit the absence of a parent, legal custodian, or caregiver responsible for a child's welfare who is a servicemember and who is deployed or anticipates being deployed from being used as a factor in determining abandonment of a child.

The bill also amends current provisions to include the SCRA as one of the specific federal laws which ch. 39, F.S., does not supersede. The bill requires the Department of Children and Families to ensure that the SCRA is observed in cases where a parent, legal custodian or caregiver responsible for a child's welfare is unable to take custody of his or her child or appear at a court proceeding in person because of his or her military service.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2020.

Vote: Senate 40-0; House 118-0