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### **Bill #775 – “Good Dad Act” - “Parental Responsibility After Acknowledgment of Paternity”**

**Tallahassee, Florida – May 6, 2023** – This legislative session, Dr. Bernard Wh Jennings, a Florida Supreme Court Certified Mediator, wrote a proposal to the State Legislature regarding unwed Fathers not having the same rights as unwed Mothers. District #107 State Representative Christopher Benjamin, Esq. (D) took interest and introduced Bill #775, “Parental Responsibility After Acknowledgment of Paternity,” to the Florida Legislature. The bill would ensure that unwed fathers have equal rights as mothers when it comes to parenting their children. “Paternity Rights of Unwed Fathers has passed all committees unanimously - the Bill seeks to place unwed fathers on even ground with wed fathers by making both parents of a child born out of wedlock the natural guardians of the child, said Representative Benjamin.

“This bill is about fairness,” said Dr. Jennings. “Ensuring that Unwed fathers have the same rights as mothers to love, care for, and support their children. This bill will ensure that they are treated equally under the law.”

The bill would do the following:

- Allow unwed fathers to establish paternity without having to go to court.
- Give unwed fathers the same rights as mothers to shared parental responsibility.

- Prohibit unwed mothers from absconding with children out of state without the father's consent.

"This bill is about giving children the best possible chance to succeed," said Dr. Jennings. "Children who grow up with both parents are more likely to be healthy, happy, and successful. This bill will help ensure that all children have that opportunity."

The bill has been endorsed by the Florida Family Policy Council, the Florida Catholic Conference, and the Florida Alliance for Fathers.

"This bill is a common-sense measure that will help ensure that all children have the opportunity to grow up with both parents," said John Stemberger, President of the Florida Family Policy Council. "We urge the Florida Legislature to pass this bill."

"This bill is a critical step in ensuring that all children have the opportunity to grow up in a loving and supportive family," said Archbishop Thomas Wenski, Chairman of the Florida Catholic Conference. "We urge the Florida Legislature to pass this bill."

"This bill is a victory for children and families," said Michael Olenick, President of the Florida Alliance for Fathers. "We urge the Florida Legislature to pass this bill."

According to the Parental Rights Amendment, a child has a right to be raised by both of his or her parents unless a court finds that a parental bond is detrimental to the child's best interest. Both parents have the fundamental right to parent their children and to make decisions regarding their care, custody, and education of children without interference from the government or third-party actors.

However, the law in Florida currently does not prohibit unmarried women from going against the wishes of their fathers and taking their children out of the state of Florida without any penalty. Instead, it permits them to do so without the risk of any punishment.

The current law of Florida does not provide a clear definition of what it means to be a father in the eyes of the law. For example, an unwed woman can give birth to a baby and declare that she is the "mother" of the child and prevent the biological father from accessing the child even though he has been paying child support for years.

The current law has a negative impact on both the father and the child, forcing them to live apart because.

1. The biological father has no legal incentive to own up to his responsibilities to the newborn baby. Some fathers have to be forced to care for their children by taking them to court and undergoing the long and tedious legal process of the court.
2. The law robs the child of the opportunity of growing up with both parents. There have been instances where a mother places her child in the foster care system without the father's acknowledgement or consent because she is unwilling to raise her child.

To ensure that children have the right to be raised by both parents, Florida needs to change its law to ensure that the rights of the biological fathers are protected and enforced. This law will ensure an unwed man who steps up after the child's birth has equal rights as the mother. The Unwed Father for the child out of wedlock has to complete and sign or notarize a voluntary acknowledgment of paternity form constituting an establishment of paternity. This form will result in a shared parental responsibility between both parties. The father does not have to file paternity documents in court to establish parental rights. Thousands of men have faced and currently are entangled with this issue throughout the State of Florida. Dr. Bernard Wh Jennings, a father who is also a Florida Supreme Court Certified Mediator through a proposal introduced this Bill to the Florida Legislature said, "This Bill #775 (The Good Dad - Unwed Fathers Act) will support the concept of family by putting unwed men on an equal footing with mothers when it comes to parenting their children"., "Fathers will no longer be helpless

and feel emasculated and robbed of their fatherhood.”, “Fathers will now have a lawful opportunity to take full responsibility of caring and providing for their children.”, said Jennings.

Similarly, in the case of married couples of a newborn child, the unwed natural father will be considered the legal father as if he were married to the natural mother at the time of birth. The unwed natural father will not have to serve paternity documents to establish his parental rights before the courts. He may choose to fast track his request to shared custody (shared parental responsibility) with the natural mother. The new law prohibits the unwed mother from legally absconding with the child out of the Jurisdiction without consent or an order of the court. Presently, under Florida Law she can leave the state without notice or consent because she is the only natural parent recognized under the law.

Now a father who has voluntarily acknowledged paternity has the same rights as the unwed mother.” Instead of limiting the rights of the biological father, the law should be changed to encourage men to take responsibility for their children financially and otherwise. This Bill #775 and the Senate version Bill #1146 coined by District #4 Republican State Senator Clay Yarborough -“the Good Dad Act”, will protect the family unit, reduce the financial burden borne by families and the tax paying public due to the current legal entanglement faced by similarly situated unwed natural fathers. Both Bills have passed both the House and the Senate without opposition. The law will go into effect on July 1, 2023, once it is signed by Governor DeSantis.

For more information contact the Bills Legislative Sponsor: State Representative Christopher E. Benjamin, Esq (D), House District 107 Phone: 305-654-7100 or Dr Bernard Wh Jennings, 786-486-7217.

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