

SECOND REGULAR SESSION

# HOUSE BILL NO. 1693

101ST GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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INTRODUCED BY REPRESENTATIVE BOGGS.

3238H.011

DANA RADEMAN MILLER, Chief Clerk

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## AN ACT

To amend chapters 451 and 452, RSMo, by adding thereto two new sections relating to covenant marriages.

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*Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the state of Missouri, as follows:*

Section A. Chapters 451 and 452, RSMo, are amended by adding thereto two new sections, to be known as sections 451.055 and 452.055, to read as follows:

**451.055. 1. This section shall be known and may be cited as the "Missouri Covenant Marriage Act".**

**2. Persons who have the legal capacity to marry under this chapter may enter into a covenant marriage by declaring their intent to do so on their application for a license obtained under section 451.040 and by complying with the requirements of this section. The returned marriage license shall be designated a covenant marriage license and shall be recorded as provided under this chapter, with an indication that the marriage is a covenant marriage. The declaration shall be filed with the recorder of deeds. Persons may still obtain a standard marriage license, but such persons shall have the option to obtain a covenant marriage license. For all intents and purposes, the covenant marriage license provision shall be considered equal to a standard marriage license and recognized by all government agencies, with all the benefits and rights of a standard marriage license.**

**3. A declaration of intent to enter into a covenant marriage shall contain all of the following:**

**(1) A written statement of the parties' intent to enter into a covenant marriage that shall be in the following form:**

EXPLANATION — Matter enclosed in bold-faced brackets ~~thus~~ in the above bill is not enacted and is intended to be omitted from the law. Matter in **bold-face** type in the above bill is proposed language.

18 **"DECLARATION OF INTENT TO ENTER INTO COVENANT**  
19 **MARRIAGE**

20 **A COVENANT MARRIAGE**

21 **We solemnly declare that we believe that marriage is a covenant**  
22 **between one man and one woman who agree to live together as**  
23 **husband and wife for as long as they both live. We have chosen**  
24 **each other carefully and have received premarital counseling on**  
25 **the nature, purposes, and responsibilities of marriage. We**  
26 **understand that a Covenant Marriage is for life and that we have**  
27 **received counseling regarding the seriousness of Covenant**  
28 **Marriage, including all the legal requirements of individuals**  
29 **when entering into Covenant Marriage. If we experience marital**  
30 **difficulties, we commit ourselves to take all reasonable efforts to**  
31 **preserve our marriage, including marital counseling.**

32 **With full knowledge of what this commitment means, we do**  
33 **declare that our marriage will be bound by Missouri law on**  
34 **covenant marriage and we promise to love, honor, and care for**  
35 **one another as husband and wife for the rest of our lives.**

36 \_\_\_\_\_

37 **Prospective Male Spouse**

38 \_\_\_\_\_

39 **Prospective Female Spouse";**

40 **(2) A notarized attestation declaring the following and to be in the following**  
41 **form:**

42 **"AFFIDAVIT**

43 **BE IT KNOWN THAT the undersigned affiants acknowledge**  
44 **that they have received at least eight hours of premarital**  
45 **counseling from a priest, minister, pastor, rabbi, any other**  
46 **clergyperson of any religious sect, or a professional marriage**  
47 **counselor. The affiants have received counseling regarding the**  
48 **seriousness of Covenant Marriage, including all the legal**

49 requirements of individuals when entering into Covenant  
 50 Marriage; communication of the fact that a Covenant Marriage is  
 51 a commitment for life; the obligation of a Covenant Marriage is to  
 52 take reasonable efforts to preserve the marriage even if marital  
 53 difficulties arise, including the obligation to seek marital  
 54 counseling in those difficult times of marital conflict; and the  
 55 limited grounds for legally terminating a Covenant Marriage by  
 56 dissolution or legal separation.

57 STATE OF MISSOURI \_\_\_\_\_)

58 COUNTY OF \_\_\_\_\_)

59 \_\_\_\_\_

60 Prospective Male Spouse

61 \_\_\_\_\_

62 Prospective Female Spouse

63 On this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ in the year \_\_\_\_\_ before me, \_\_\_\_\_  
 64 \_ (Name of Notary) Notary Public duly commissioned and acting  
 65 within and for the County and State aforesaid, personally  
 66 appeared \_\_\_\_\_ (Prospective Male Spouse) and \_\_\_\_\_  
 67 (Prospective Female Spouse) known to me to be the identical  
 68 persons whose names are affixed hereto, and who executed the  
 69 Affidavit, and acknowledged that they executed the same for the  
 70 uses and purposes therein contained and set forth.

71 (Seal)

72 My commission expires: \_\_\_\_\_

73 Notary Public \_\_\_\_\_";

74 (3) A notarized attestation that is signed by the clergy or counselor and to be in  
 75 the following form:

76 "ATTESTATION FOR COUNSELOR OR CLERGY

77 **As a priest, minister, pastor, rabbi, any other clergy person of any**  
 78 **religious sect, or a professional marriage counselor, I attest that**  
 79 **the prospective spouses seeking Covenant Marriage received**  
 80 **counseling from either me or a member of my organization as to**  
 81 **the nature and purpose of Covenant Marriage that included all**  
 82 **the legal requirements of individuals when entering into**  
 83 **Covenant Marriage; communication of the fact that a Covenant**  
 84 **Marriage is a commitment for life; communication of the fact that**  
 85 **the obligation of a Covenant Marriage is to take reasonable**  
 86 **efforts to preserve the marriage even if marital difficulties arise,**  
 87 **including the obligation to seek marital counseling in those**  
 88 **difficult times of marital conflict; and the limited grounds for**  
 89 **legally terminating a Covenant Marriage by dissolution or legal**  
 90 **separation.**

91 \_\_\_\_\_

92 **Counselor/Clergy**

93 \_\_\_\_\_

94 **Title (if applicable)**

95 \_\_\_\_\_

96 **Organization (if applicable)**

97 **AFFIDAVIT**

98 **BE IT KNOWN THAT the undersigned affiant acknowledges**  
 99 **that the prospective spouses seeking Covenant Marriage have**  
 100 **received at least eight hours of premarital counseling from either**  
 101 **a priest, minister, pastor, rabbi, any other clergy person of any**  
 102 **religious sect, or a professional marriage counselor. The**  
 103 **counseling included a discussion of the seriousness of Covenant**  
 104 **Marriage, including all the legal requirements of individuals**  
 105 **when entering into Covenant Marriage; communication of the**  
 106 **fact that a Covenant Marriage is a commitment for life;**  
 107 **communication of the fact that the obligation of a Covenant**

108 **Marriage is to take reasonable efforts to preserve the marriage**  
109 **even if marital difficulties arise, including the obligation to seek**  
110 **marital counseling in those difficult times of marital conflict; and**  
111 **the limited grounds for legally terminating a Covenant Marriage**  
112 **by dissolution or legal separation.**

113 **STATE OF MISSOURI \_\_\_\_\_)**

114 **COUNTY OF \_\_\_\_\_)**

115 \_\_\_\_\_

116 **Counselor/Clergy**

117 **On this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ in the year \_\_\_\_\_ before me, \_\_\_\_\_**  
118 **\_ (Name of Notary) Notary Public duly commissioned and acting**  
119 **within and for the County and State aforesaid, personally**  
120 **appeared \_\_\_\_\_ (counselor, priest, minister, pastor, rabbi, or**  
121 **other clergy) known to me to be the identical person whose name**  
122 **is affixed hereto, and who executed the Affidavit, and**  
123 **acknowledged that they executed the same for the uses and**  
124 **purposes therein contained and set forth.**

125 **(Seal)**

126 **My commission expires: \_\_\_\_\_**

127 **Notary Public \_\_\_\_\_"; and**

128 **(4) (a) If a husband and wife have previously obtained a standard marriage**  
129 **license but would like to convert the standard marriage license to a covenant marriage**  
130 **license, a notarized attestation, to be in a form as provided under paragraph (b) of this**  
131 **subdivision, of the husband's and wife's intent to convert to a covenant marriage shall**  
132 **be submitted to the recorder of deeds. A husband and wife who apply for a covenant**  
133 **marriage conversion under this subdivision shall not be required to receive premarital**  
134 **counseling, and the husband and wife are not required to have the converted covenant**  
135 **marriage separately solemnized. The conversion of the standard marriage to covenant**  
136 **marriage of a previously married couple shall not require the attestations by clergy or**  
137 **counselors. Conversion to a covenant marriage shall not make valid a marriage that is**  
138 **prohibited under this chapter or that is not validly contracted in this state.**

139 (b) A notarized attestation of the intent to convert a standard marriage license to  
140 a covenant marriage license shall be in the following form:

141 "DECLARATION OF INTENT TO CONVERT TO  
142 COVENANT MARRIAGE

143 A COVENANT MARRIAGE

144 We solemnly declare that we believe that marriage is a covenant  
145 between one man and one woman who agree to live together as  
146 husband and wife for as long as they both live. We understand  
147 that a covenant marriage is for life and that we understand the  
148 seriousness of Covenant Marriage, including all the legal  
149 requirements of individuals when entering into Covenant  
150 Marriage. If we experience marital difficulties, we commit  
151 ourselves to take all reasonable efforts to preserve our marriage,  
152 including marital counseling.

153 With full knowledge of what this commitment means, we do  
154 declare that our marriage will be bound by Missouri law on  
155 Covenant Marriage, and we promise to love, honor, and care for  
156 one another as husband and wife for the rest of our lives.

157 \_\_\_\_\_

158 Male Spouse

159 \_\_\_\_\_

160 Female Spouse

161 AFFIDAVIT

162 BE IT KNOWN THAT the undersigned affiants acknowledge  
163 that they are requesting to convert their existing marriage license  
164 to a covenant marriage license. The affiants acknowledge and  
165 understand the seriousness of Covenant Marriage, including all  
166 the legal requirements of individuals when entering into  
167 Covenant Marriage; the fact that a Covenant Marriage is a  
168 commitment for life; the fact that the obligation of a Covenant  
169 Marriage is to take reasonable efforts to preserve the marriage

170 even if marital difficulties arise, including the obligation to seek  
171 marital counseling in those difficult times of marital conflict; and  
172 the limited grounds for legally terminating a Covenant Marriage  
173 by divorce or legal separation.

174 STATE OF MISSOURI \_\_\_\_\_)

175 COUNTY OF \_\_\_\_\_)

176 \_\_\_\_\_

177 Male Spouse

178 \_\_\_\_\_

179 Female Spouse

180 On this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ in the year \_\_\_\_\_ before me, \_\_\_\_\_  
181 \_ (Name of Notary) Notary Public duly commissioned and acting  
182 within and for the County and State aforesaid, personally  
183 appeared \_\_\_\_\_ (Male Spouse) and \_\_\_\_\_ (Female Spouse)  
184 known to me to be the identical persons whose names are affixed  
185 hereto, and who executed the Affidavit and acknowledged that  
186 they executed the same for the uses and purposes therein  
187 contained and set forth.

188 (Seal)

189 My commission expires: \_\_\_\_\_

190 Notary Public \_\_\_\_\_".

191 4. The recorder of deeds shall document that the attestations were submitted and  
192 shall file all covenant marriage license documentation according to the laws of the state  
193 of Missouri. If all the provisions have been met under this section, the recorder of deeds  
194 shall issue to the husband and wife a marriage license certificate that documents the  
195 husband's and wife's covenant marriage or conversion to a covenant marriage  
196 accordingly.

197 5. The state of Missouri shall publish a page on its website titled "Missouri  
198 Covenant Marriage Act". The page shall describe the requirements for entering into a  
199 covenant marriage under this section and the grounds necessary to obtain a decree of

200 dissolution of covenant marriage or a legal separation of covenant marriage under  
201 section 452.055.

452.055. 1. A husband and wife who entered into a covenant marriage under  
2 section 451.055 may file a petition for legal separation of covenant marriage at any time,  
3 but a petition for dissolution of covenant marriage shall be filed only after the court has  
4 ordered a legal separation. The court may enter temporary orders at any time after a  
5 petition for legal separation of covenant marriage or a petition for dissolution of  
6 covenant marriage has been filed under this section.

7 2. Regardless of whether a husband and wife have entered into a standard  
8 marriage or covenant marriage, if there is a court-ordered requirement that divorcing  
9 or separating parents with at least one minor child are required to attend a parenting  
10 education class, the parties may opt for a faith-based alternative program as long as that  
11 program informs the parties of the effects of divorce on families and children.

12 3. If a husband and wife have entered into a covenant marriage under section  
13 451.055, the court shall require that both parties attend at least forty hours of marital  
14 counseling before a dissolution may be granted. Counseling may be provided by either a  
15 faith-based organization or a professional marriage counselor or agency thereof.

16 4. If a husband and wife have entered into a covenant marriage under section  
17 451.055, the court shall not enter a decree of dissolution until at least two years have  
18 passed after the initial filing for legal separation or dissolution, and the court shall grant  
19 a dissolution for divorce only after first ordering a legal separation, including any  
20 temporary orders deemed necessary by the court for the following situations:

21 (1) Either spouse has committed adultery;

22 (2) Either spouse has habitually abused drugs or alcohol;

23 (3) Either spouse has committed a felony and has been sentenced to death or  
24 imprisonment in any federal, state, county, or municipal correctional facility;

25 (4) Either spouse has physically or sexually abused the other spouse, a child, a  
26 relative of either spouse permanently living in the matrimonial domicile, or has  
27 committed domestic violence or severe emotional abuse;

28 (5) Either spouse has abandoned the matrimonial domicile and has not been in  
29 contact with the other spouse for at least two years and that spouse refuses to return. A  
30 party may file a petition based on this ground by alleging that his or her spouse has  
31 abandoned the matrimonial domicile and is expected to remain absent for the required  
32 period of at least two years. If his or her spouse has not abandoned the matrimonial  
33 domicile for the required period of two years at the time of the filing of the petition, the  
34 action of a dissolution of marriage shall be stayed for the period of time remaining to



35 meet the grounds based on abandonment; except that, the court may enter and enforce  
36 temporary orders of a legal separation during the time that the action is pending;

37 (6) The spouses have been living separate and apart continuously without  
38 reconciliation for at least two years. A party may file a petition based on this ground by  
39 alleging that it is expected that the parties have been living separate and apart for the  
40 required period of at least two years. If the parties have not been separated  
41 continuously for the required period of at least two years at the time of the filing of the  
42 petition, the action of dissolution of marriage shall be stayed until the requirement of  
43 living apart and separate continuously for at least two years is met; except that, the  
44 court may enter and enforce temporary orders for a legal separation during the time  
45 that the action is pending; or

46 (7) The husband and wife have attended at least forty hours of marital  
47 counseling sessions over the course of at least two years.

48 5. Dissolution under this section shall be granted after all other remedies under  
49 this section have failed.

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