

HB 541

2011

1                   A bill to be entitled  
2     An act relating to paternity; amending s. 39.001, F.S.;  
3     providing purposes of provisions relating to paternity;  
4     amending s. 39.01, F.S.; adding and revising definitions;  
5     amending s. 39.502, F.S.; providing for service of a  
6     notice of the petition for dependency; specifying  
7     requirements for such notice; specifying conditions under  
8     which an unmarried biological father may not contest the  
9     petition for dependency or any subsequent petition for  
10    termination of parental rights, unless a court orders  
11    otherwise; eliminating the defense of lack of notice for  
12    such fathers who are not identified after specified  
13    inquiry; amending s. 39.503, F.S.; revising requirements  
14    for an inquiry to be conducted when the identity or  
15    location of a parent is unknown and a petition for  
16    dependency or shelter is filed; providing that a  
17    prospective parent may file a sworn affidavit of  
18    parenthood only when the child does not have two legally  
19    recognized parents; providing for a prospective parent to  
20    seek to establish paternity in such circumstances;  
21    deleting provisions relating to the effect of a  
22    prospective parent's filing of an affidavit of parenthood  
23    while the child is a dependent child in certain  
24    circumstances; providing for a request to establish  
25    paternity and substitute parental rights when no parent  
26    objects; providing for scientific testing in certain  
27    circumstances; amending s. 39.801, F.S.; providing for  
28    service of notice of a petition for termination of

29 | parental rights on any known and locatable unmarried  
 30 | biological father; specifying conditions under which an  
 31 | unmarried biological father shall be precluded from  
 32 | contesting the petition for termination of parental  
 33 | rights, unless a court orders otherwise; eliminating the  
 34 | defense of lack of notice for such fathers who are not  
 35 | identified after specified inquiry; amending s. 39.803,  
 36 | F.S.; revising the requirements for an inquiry to be  
 37 | conducted when the identity or location of a parent is  
 38 | unknown and a petition for termination of parental rights  
 39 | is filed; providing an effective date.

40 |

41 | Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

42 |

43 | Section 1. Paragraphs (o), (p), and (q) are added to  
 44 | subsection (1) of section 39.001, Florida Statutes, to read:

45 | 39.001 Purposes and intent; personnel standards and  
 46 | screening.—

47 | (1) PURPOSES OF CHAPTER.—The purposes of this chapter are:

48 | (o) To ensure that children have the benefit of loving and  
 49 | caring relationships with both of their parents and with both  
 50 | maternal and paternal relatives, whenever possible. To that end,  
 51 | parents shall be engaged to the fullest extent possible in the  
 52 | lives of their children, and prospective parents shall be  
 53 | afforded a prompt, full, and fair opportunity to establish  
 54 | parenthood and to assume all parental duties. However, a  
 55 | prospective parent who is an unmarried biological father, as  
 56 | defined in s. 63.032, shall have no greater rights under this

HB 541

2011

57 chapter than he would have under chapter 63. Accordingly, his  
58 interest is inchoate until such time as he demonstrates a timely  
59 and full commitment to the responsibilities of parenthood.  
60 Because time is of the essence under this chapter and time  
61 limitations are to benefit the child, the parents or any  
62 prospective parents, including unmarried biological parents,  
63 must be aware that failure to comply with the specific  
64 requirements of this chapter may result in permanent elimination  
65 or termination of their rights or interests as parents or  
66 prospective parents, whether actual or inchoate.

67 (p) To ensure that each child's opportunity for a  
68 permanent, loving, and stable family is protected under the law  
69 by recognizing that each child has only two legally recognized  
70 parents entitled to the rights and responsibilities of  
71 parenthood. If a third person seeks parental rights to the child  
72 claiming a biological connection to the child, that person must  
73 act expeditiously within the timeframes established by this  
74 chapter to assert and establish his or her parental rights.

75 (q) To ensure that an unmarried biological father has an  
76 inchoate interest that acquires constitutional protection only  
77 when he demonstrates a timely and full commitment to the  
78 responsibilities of parenthood. For this reason, the state has a  
79 compelling interest in requiring an unmarried biological father  
80 to demonstrate that commitment by providing appropriate medical  
81 care and financial support and by establishing legal paternity  
82 rights in accordance with the requirements of this chapter.

83 Section 2. Subsection (49) of section 39.01, Florida  
84 Statutes, is amended, subsection (76) of that section is

HB 541

2011

85 redesignated as subsection (77), and a new subsection (76) is  
86 added to that section, to read:

87 39.01 Definitions.—When used in this chapter, unless the  
88 context otherwise requires:

89 (49) "Parent" means a woman who gives birth to a child and  
90 a man who was married to the mother at the time of the child's  
91 conception or birth, who has legally adopted the child, who was  
92 adjudicated by the court to be the father of the child by the  
93 date of an advisory hearing held on a petition for termination  
94 of parental rights, or who has filed an affidavit of paternity  
95 pursuant to s. 382.013(2)(c) by the date that an advisory  
96 hearing is held on a petition for termination of parental rights  
97 ~~whose consent to the adoption of the child would be required~~  
98 ~~under s. 63.062(1)~~. If a child has been legally adopted, the  
99 term "parent" means the adoptive mother or father of the child.  
100 The term does not include an individual whose parental  
101 relationship to the child has been legally terminated, or an  
102 alleged or prospective parent, unless the parental status falls  
103 within the terms of s. 39.503(1) or s. 63.062(1). For purposes  
104 of this chapter only, when the phrase "parent or legal  
105 custodian" is used, it refers to rights or responsibilities of  
106 the parent and, only if there is no living parent with intact  
107 parental rights, to the rights or responsibilities of the legal  
108 custodian who has assumed the role of the parent.

109 (76) "Unmarried biological father" means the child's  
110 biological father who is not married to the child's mother at  
111 the time of conception or birth of the child and who, before the  
112 advisory hearing is held on a petition to terminate parental

HB 541

2011

113 rights, has not been adjudicated or declared by a court of  
114 competent jurisdiction to be the legal father of the child or  
115 has not executed an affidavit of paternity pursuant to s.  
116 382.013(2)(c). There can be no unmarried biological father if  
117 the mother is married at the time of conception or birth of the  
118 child, unless otherwise ordered by the dependency court.

119 Section 3. Subsection (6) of section 39.502, Florida  
120 Statutes, is amended to read:

121 39.502 Notice, process, and service.—

122 (6)(a) It is the duty of the petitioner or moving party to  
123 notify all participants and parties known to the petitioner or  
124 moving party of all hearings subsequent to the initial hearing  
125 unless notice is contained in prior court orders and these  
126 orders were provided to the participant or party. Proof of  
127 notice or provision of orders may be provided by certified mail  
128 with a signed return receipt.

129 (b) Notice of the petition for dependency shall be  
130 individually served upon any known and locatable unmarried  
131 biological father who is identified under oath before the court  
132 or who is identified by a diligent search of the Florida  
133 Putative Father Registry. Service of the notice of the petition  
134 for dependency is not required if the unmarried biological  
135 father signs an affidavit of nonpaternity or a consent to  
136 termination of his parental rights and the affidavit or consent  
137 is accepted by the department. The recipient of the notice may  
138 waive service of process by executing a waiver and acknowledging  
139 receipt of the notice. The notice of petition for dependency  
140 must specifically state that if the unmarried biological father

HB 541

2011

141 desires to contest the dependency petition and assert his  
142 parental rights, he must, within 30 days after service:

143 1. File a claim of paternity with the Florida Putative  
144 Father Registry maintained by the Office of Vital Statistics.

145 2. Legally establish his rights to the child pursuant to  
146 this chapter.

147 3. File a verified response with the court which contains  
148 a pledge of commitment to the child, a request for the court to  
149 calculate and order child support, and an agreement to submit to  
150 the court jurisdiction.

151 4. Provide support for the child as calculated by the  
152 court under s. 61.30.

153 5. Establish a substantial relationship with the child  
154 within the parameters established by court order. A father must  
155 develop a substantial relationship with the child by taking some  
156 measure of responsibility for the child and the child's future,  
157 and by demonstrating a full commitment to the responsibility of  
158 parenthood by providing financial support to the child in  
159 accordance with his ability, if not prevented from doing so by  
160 the person or authorized agency having lawful custody of the  
161 child, and either:

162 a. Regularly visit the child at least monthly, when  
163 physically and financially able to do so and when not prevented  
164 from doing so by the person or authorized agency having lawful  
165 custody of the child; or

166 b. Maintain regular communication with the child or with  
167 the person or agency having the care or custody of the child,  
168 when physically or financially unable to visit the child or when

169 not prevented from doing so by the person or authorized agency  
 170 having lawful custody of the child.

171 (c) If the unmarried biological father fails to:

172 1. Timely and properly file a verified response with the  
 173 court which contains a pledge of commitment to the child;

174 2. File a claim of paternity with the Florida Putative  
 175 Father Registry maintained by the Office of Vital Statistics;

176 3. Legally establish his paternity to the child; or

177 4. Provide support for the child in an amount to be  
 178 determined under s. 61.30,

179  
 180 the unmarried biological father shall be precluded from  
 181 contesting the petition for dependency or any subsequent  
 182 petition for termination of parental rights, unless otherwise  
 183 ordered by the court. The unmarried biological father is not  
 184 entitled to any further notice of any proceedings regarding the  
 185 child, unless otherwise ordered by the court.

186 (d) If an unmarried biological father is not identified  
 187 pursuant to the court inquiry in this subsection, the unmarried  
 188 biological father's claim that he did not receive actual notice  
 189 of the dependency proceeding is not a defense to a finding that  
 190 the child is dependent.

191 Section 4. Subsections (1) and (8) of section 39.503,  
 192 Florida Statutes, are amended to read:

193 39.503 Identity or location of parent unknown; special  
 194 procedures.—

195 (1) If the identity or location of a parent is unknown and  
 196 a petition for dependency or shelter is filed, the court shall

HB 541

2011

197 | conduct the following inquiry of the parent or legal custodian  
 198 | who is available, or, if no parent or legal custodian is  
 199 | available, of any relative or custodian of the child who is  
 200 | present at the hearing and likely to have the information:

201 |     (a) Regarding the identity of any man to whom the mother  
 202 | of the child was married at any time when conception of the  
 203 | child may have occurred or at the time of the birth of the  
 204 | child.

205 |     (b) Regarding the identity of any man who has filed an  
 206 | affidavit of paternity pursuant to s. 382.013(2)(c) before an  
 207 | advisory hearing is held on a petition for termination of  
 208 | parental rights.

209 |     (c) Regarding the identity of any man who has adopted the  
 210 | child.

211 |     (d) Regarding the identity of any man who has been  
 212 | adjudicated by a court as the father of the child before an  
 213 | advisory hearing is held on a petition for termination of  
 214 | parental rights.

215 |     (e) Regarding the identity of any man whom the mother  
 216 | identified as the father under oath to a representative of the  
 217 | department.

218 |     ~~(a) Whether the mother of the child was married at the~~  
 219 | ~~probable time of conception of the child or at the time of birth~~  
 220 | ~~of the child.~~

221 |     (f)~~(b)~~ Whether the mother was cohabiting with a male at  
 222 | the probable time of conception of the child.

223 |     (g)~~(e)~~ Whether the mother has received payments or  
 224 | promises of support with respect to the child or because of her



225 pregnancy from a man who claims to be the father.

226 (h)~~(d)~~ Whether the mother has named any man as the father  
 227 on the birth certificate of the child or in connection with  
 228 applying for or receiving public assistance.

229 (i)~~(e)~~ Whether any man has acknowledged or claimed  
 230 paternity of the child in a jurisdiction in which the mother  
 231 resided at the time of or since conception of the child, or in  
 232 which the child has resided or resides.

233 (8) (a) If the inquiry and diligent search identifies a  
 234 prospective parent, that person must be given the opportunity to  
 235 become a party to the proceedings by completing a sworn  
 236 affidavit of parenthood and filing it with the court or the  
 237 department. A prospective parent may file a sworn affidavit of  
 238 parenthood only when the child does not have two legally  
 239 recognized parents. If a child has two legally recognized  
 240 parents, the prospective parent must seek to establish paternity  
 241 under chapter 742 and substitute the prospective parent's rights  
 242 for the rights of the other parent. The dependency court may  
 243 consider the petition to establish paternity under chapter 742  
 244 as part of the dependency proceedings, including entry of an  
 245 order or judgment establishing paternity. ~~A prospective parent~~  
 246 ~~who files a sworn affidavit of parenthood while the child is a~~  
 247 ~~dependent child but no later than at the time of or prior to the~~  
 248 ~~adjudicatory hearing in any termination of parental rights~~  
 249 ~~proceeding for the child shall be considered a parent for all~~  
 250 ~~purposes under this section unless the other parent contests the~~  
 251 ~~determination of parenthood. If the known parent contests the~~  
 252 ~~recognition of the prospective parent as a parent, the~~

HB 541

2011

253 ~~prospective parent shall not be recognized as a parent until~~  
254 ~~proceedings under chapter 742 have been concluded. However, the~~  
255 ~~prospective parent shall continue to receive notice of hearings~~  
256 ~~as a participant pending results of the chapter 742 proceedings.~~

257 (b) If neither parent objects, the court may enter an  
258 agreed order substituting the prospective parent's rights to the  
259 child for the right of the legally recognized parent, order the  
260 Office of Vital Statistics to amend the child's birth record,  
261 and order the petitioning parent to pay support for the child.  
262 If either parent objects to the substitution of parental rights,  
263 the prospective parent shall proceed to litigate parental rights  
264 pursuant to chapter 742. The dependency court may consider the  
265 petition to establish paternity under chapter 742 as part of the  
266 dependency proceedings, including entry of an order or judgment  
267 establishing paternity.

268 (c) If the prospective parent does not file a sworn  
269 affidavit of parenthood or if the other parent contests the  
270 determination of parenthood, the court may, after considering  
271 the best interest of the child, order scientific testing to  
272 determine the maternity or paternity of the child. Test results  
273 are admissible in evidence and shall be weighed along with other  
274 evidence of the maternity or paternity of the alleged mother or  
275 father, unless the statistical probability of maternity or  
276 paternity equals or exceeds 95 percent. A statistical  
277 probability of maternity or paternity of 95 percent or more  
278 creates a rebuttable presumption, as provided in s. 90.304, that  
279 the alleged mother or father is the biological mother or father  
280 of the child. If a party fails to rebut the presumption of

HB 541

2011

281 maternity or paternity which arose from the statistical  
 282 probability of maternity or paternity of 95 percent or more, the  
 283 court may enter a summary judgment of maternity or paternity. If  
 284 the test results show the alleged mother or father cannot be the  
 285 biological mother or father, the prospective parent shall no  
 286 longer be entitled to notice of the proceedings. The court shall  
 287 assess the cost of the scientific testing as a cost of  
 288 litigation.

289 Section 5. Subsection (3) of section 39.801, Florida  
 290 Statutes, is amended to read:

291 39.801 Procedures and jurisdiction; notice; service of  
 292 process.—

293 (3) Before the court may terminate parental rights, in  
 294 addition to the other requirements set forth in this part, the  
 295 following requirements must be met:

296 (a) Notice of the date, time, and place of the advisory  
 297 hearing for the petition to terminate parental rights and a copy  
 298 of the petition must be personally served upon the following  
 299 persons, specifically notifying them that a petition has been  
 300 filed:

- 301 1. The parents of the child.
- 302 2. The legal custodians of the child.
- 303 3. If the parents who would be entitled to notice are dead  
 304 or unknown, a living relative of the child, unless upon diligent  
 305 search and inquiry no such relative can be found.
- 306 4. Any person who has physical custody of the child.
- 307 5. Any grandparent entitled to priority for adoption under  
 308 s. 63.0425.

HB 541

2011

309 6. Any prospective parent who has been identified under s.  
310 39.503 or s. 39.803.

311 7. The guardian ad litem for the child or the  
312 representative of the guardian ad litem program, if the program  
313 has been appointed.

314  
315 The document containing the notice to respond or appear must  
316 contain, in type at least as large as the type in the balance of  
317 the document, the following or substantially similar language:

318 "FAILURE TO PERSONALLY APPEAR AT THIS ADVISORY HEARING  
319 CONSTITUTES CONSENT TO THE TERMINATION OF PARENTAL RIGHTS OF  
320 THIS CHILD (OR CHILDREN). IF YOU FAIL TO APPEAR ON THE DATE AND  
321 TIME SPECIFIED, YOU MAY LOSE ALL LEGAL RIGHTS AS A PARENT TO THE  
322 CHILD OR CHILDREN NAMED IN THE PETITION ATTACHED TO THIS  
323 NOTICE."

324 (b) Notice of the petition for termination of parental  
325 rights shall be individually served upon any known and locatable  
326 unmarried biological father who is identified under oath before  
327 the court or who is identified by a diligent search of the  
328 Florida Putative Father Registry. Service of the notice of the  
329 petition for termination of parental rights is not required if  
330 the unmarried biological father signs an affidavit of  
331 nonpaternity or a consent to termination of his parental rights  
332 and the affidavit or consent is accepted by the department. The  
333 recipient of the notice may waive service of process by  
334 executing a waiver and acknowledging receipt of the notice. The  
335 notice of petition for termination of parental rights must  
336 specifically state that if the unmarried biological father

HB 541

2011

337 desires to contest the petition and assert his parental rights,  
338 he must, within 30 days after service:

339 1. File a claim of paternity with the Florida Putative  
340 Father Registry maintained by the Office of Vital Statistics.

341 2. Legally establish his rights to the child pursuant to  
342 the provisions of this chapter.

343 3. File a verified response with the court which contains  
344 a pledge of commitment to the child, a request for the court to  
345 calculate and order child support, and an agreement to submit to  
346 the court jurisdiction.

347 4. Provide support for the child as calculated by the  
348 court under s. 61.30.

349 5. Establish a substantial relationship with the child  
350 within the parameters established by court order. A father must  
351 develop a substantial relationship with the child by taking some  
352 measure of responsibility for the child and the child's future,  
353 and by demonstrating a full commitment to the responsibility of  
354 parenthood by providing financial support to the child in  
355 accordance with his ability, if not prevented from doing so by  
356 the person or authorized agency having lawful custody of the  
357 child, and either:

358 a. Regularly visit the child at least monthly, when  
359 physically and financially able to do so and when not prevented  
360 from doing so by the person or authorized agency having lawful  
361 custody of the child; or

362 b. Maintain regular communication with the child or with  
363 the person or agency having the care or custody of the child,  
364 when physically or financially unable to visit the child or when

365 not prevented from doing so by the person or authorized agency  
 366 having lawful custody of the child.

367 (c) If the unmarried biological father fails to:

368 1. Timely and properly file a verified response with the  
 369 court which contains a pledge of commitment to the child;

370 2. File a claim of paternity with the Florida Putative  
 371 Father Registry maintained by the Office of Vital Statistics;

372 3. Legally establish his paternity to the child; or

373 4. Provide support for the child in an amount to be  
 374 determined under s. 61.30,

375  
 376 the unmarried biological father shall be precluded from  
 377 contesting the petition for termination of parental rights,  
 378 unless otherwise ordered by the court. The unmarried biological  
 379 father is not entitled to any further notice of any proceedings  
 380 regarding the child, unless otherwise ordered by the court.

381 (d) If an unmarried biological father is not identified  
 382 pursuant to the court inquiry under this subsection, the  
 383 unmarried biological father's claim that he did not receive  
 384 actual notice of the termination proceeding is not a defense to  
 385 the petition nor grounds that the proceeding is otherwise  
 386 defective.

387 (e)-(b) If a party required to be served with notice as  
 388 prescribed in paragraph (a) cannot be served, notice of hearings  
 389 must be given as prescribed by the rules of civil procedure, and  
 390 service of process must be made as specified by law or civil  
 391 actions.

392 (f)-(e) Notice as prescribed by this section may be waived,

HB 541

2011

393 in the discretion of the judge, with regard to any person to  
 394 whom notice must be given under this subsection if the person  
 395 executes, before two witnesses and a notary public or other  
 396 officer authorized to take acknowledgments, a written surrender  
 397 of the child to a licensed child-placing agency or the  
 398 department.

399 (g) ~~(d)~~ If the person served with notice under this section  
 400 fails to personally appear at the advisory hearing, the failure  
 401 to personally appear shall constitute consent for termination of  
 402 parental rights by the person given notice. If a parent appears  
 403 for the advisory hearing and the court orders that parent to  
 404 personally appear at the adjudicatory hearing for the petition  
 405 for termination of parental rights, stating the date, time, and  
 406 location of said hearing, then failure of that parent to  
 407 personally appear at the adjudicatory hearing shall constitute  
 408 consent for termination of parental rights.

409 Section 6. Subsection (1) of section 39.803, Florida  
 410 Statutes, is amended to read:

411 39.803 Identity or location of parent unknown after filing  
 412 of termination of parental rights petition; special procedures.-

413 (1) If the identity or location of a parent is unknown and  
 414 a petition for termination of parental rights is filed, the  
 415 court shall conduct the following inquiry of the parent who is  
 416 available, or, if no parent is available, of any relative,  
 417 caregiver, or legal custodian of the child who is present at the  
 418 hearing and likely to have the information:

419 (a) Regarding the identity of any man to whom the mother  
 420 of the child was married at any time when conception of the

HB 541

2011

421 child may have occurred or at the time of the birth of the  
 422 child.

423 (b) Regarding the identity of any man who has filed an  
 424 affidavit of paternity pursuant to s. 382.013(2)(c) before an  
 425 advisory hearing is held on a petition for termination of  
 426 parental rights.

427 (c) Regarding the identity of any man who has adopted the  
 428 child.

429 (d) Regarding the identity of any man who has been  
 430 adjudicated by a court as the father of the child before an  
 431 advisory hearing is held on a petition for termination of  
 432 parental rights.

433 (e) Regarding the identity of any man whom the mother  
 434 identified as the father under oath to a representative of the  
 435 department.

436 ~~(a) Whether the mother of the child was married at the~~  
 437 ~~probable time of conception of the child or at the time of birth~~  
 438 ~~of the child.~~

439 (f)~~(b)~~ Whether the mother was cohabiting with a male at  
 440 the probable time of conception of the child.

441 (g)~~(e)~~ Whether the mother has received payments or  
 442 promises of support with respect to the child or because of her  
 443 pregnancy from a man who claims to be the father.

444 (h)~~(d)~~ Whether the mother has named any man as the father  
 445 on the birth certificate of the child or in connection with  
 446 applying for or receiving public assistance.

447 (i)~~(e)~~ Whether any man has acknowledged or claimed  
 448 paternity of the child in a jurisdiction in which the mother



HB 541

2011

449 | resided at the time of or since conception of the child, or in  
450 | which the child has resided or resides.

451 |       Section 7. This act shall take effect July 1, 2011.