

# House acts on international child support treaty

WASHINGTON — Legislation passed by the House Tuesday would make it easier for states to collect child support payments from parents living outside the United States.

The measure, approved by a voice vote, would put the United States on a course to ratifying a 2007 international treaty on child support under which participants would cooperate in ensuring that families receive the financial support they are legally entitled to.

"This bill is about empowering states, which operate the child support enforcement program, to do more to help families, and most importantly, children," said Rep. Rick Berg, R-N.D., the bill's sponsor.

The 2007 Hague Convention on the International Recovery of Child Support and Other Forms of Family Maintenance has been signed by the United States, the European Union and several other mostly European countries, including Ukraine, Albania, Norway and Bosnia and Herzegovina. So far, only Norway has ratified it.

The Senate gave its consent to the treaty in 2010, and Berg's legislation, which still has to get Senate approval, would provide the needed implementing language.

It also establishes a standardized process for sharing information with other countries.

Currently, the United States has bilateral child support agreements with 15 countries. Kay Farley, former president of the National Child Support Enforcement Association, told a House Ways and Means Committee hearing in March that while child support agencies in the United States often enforce child support obligations, many foreign countries have not been processing similar requests from the United States.

Marilyn Stephen, director of child support for the Michigan Department of Human Services, told the same hearing that her state is handling 4,000 to 5,000 cases in which a parent lives in another country and it is common for families to have to wait five years or more for a support obligation to be established even with countries sharing a bilateral agreement.

The National Child Support Enforcement Association on Tuesday urged ratification of the treaty. "As more parents cross international borders leaving children behind, international child support enforcement is more important than ever," it said.

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