

Stricken language would be deleted from and underlined language would be added to the law as it existed prior to this session of the General Assembly.

1 State of Arkansas
2 86th General Assembly
3 Regular Session, 2007
4

As Engrossed: H3/20/07

A Bill

HOUSE BILL 2476

5 By: Representative Lamoureux
6
7

For An Act To Be Entitled

9 AN ACT TO PROVIDE INFORMATIONAL PAMPHLETS ON
10 MARRIAGE TO COUPLES RECEIVING A MARRIAGE LICENSE;
11 AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.
12

Subtitle

14 TO PROVIDE INFORMATIONAL PAMPHLETS ON
15 MARRIAGE TO COUPLES RECEIVING A MARRIAGE
16 LICENSE.
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19 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ARKANSAS:
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21 SECTION 1. Arkansas Code Title 9, Chapter 11, Subchapter 2 is amended
22 to add an additional section to read as follows:

23 9-11-222. Premarital information pamphlets.

24 (a) The General Assembly finds based on reliable research that:

25 (1) The divorce rate has been accelerating;

26 (2) Just as the family is the foundation of society, the marital
27 relationship is the foundation of the family and strengthening marriages can
28 only lead to stronger families, children, and communities, as well as a
29 stronger economy;

30 (3) An inability to cope with stress from both internal sources
31 and external sources leads to significantly higher incidents of domestic
32 violence, child abuse, absenteeism, medical costs, learning deficiencies,
33 social deficiencies, and divorce;

34 (4) Relationship skills can be learned;

35 (5) Once learned, relationship skills can facilitate
36 communication between parties to a marriage and assist couples in avoiding



1 conflict;

2 (6) Once relationship skills are learned, they are generalized
3 to parenting, the workplace, schools, neighborhoods, and civic relationships;

4 (7) By reducing conflict and increasing communication, stressors
5 can be diminished and coping can be furthered;

6 (8) When effective coping exists, domestic violence, child
7 abuse, and divorce and its effect on children, namely absenteeism, medical
8 costs, learning deficiencies, and social deficiencies, are diminished; and

9 (9) The state has a compelling interest in educating its
10 citizens with regard to marriage.

11 (b) The Administrative Office of the Courts shall promulgate an
12 informational pamphlet, entitled "Information to Strengthen your Marriage"
13 that shall be made available to any couple in Arkansas when they receives a
14 marriage license.

15 (c)(1) The Administrative Office of the Courts shall have authority to
16 receive private funds and any other private assistance necessary to design,
17 print, and distribute the information pamphlets to the County Clerks.

18 (2) No public funds shall be used for designing, printing, or
19 distribution of the information pamphlets to the County Clerks.

20 (d) The pamphlet shall include the following:

21 Creating a strong marriage demands dedication, commitment, and learning
22 how to handle conflict and disagreements effectively. Research on marriage
23 shows three factors predict success in marriage: (1) Communication skills,
24 (2) Dealing with conflict, (3) Understanding expectations.

25
26 BUILDING COMMUNICATION SKILLS

27 Good communication means saying what needs to be said, and listening
28 with understanding. Speaking directly takes practice and skill. Spouses
29 often assume their spouses know what they think or feel. Communication is a
30 two-way street. Don't lecture or talk too much. Many of us do not listen
31 well when we hear another person speak. As the other talks, we are often
32 judging what is said and thinking what to say next. The most important thing
33 to do when talking with your spouse is to really try to understand what he or
34 she is saying. Agreement is less important than understanding. When you do
35 understand, it is helpful to show your spouse that you do. A great way to
36 show you understand your spouse is to try to put your spouse's views into

1 your own words. This does several things: (1) It shows that you are really
2 paying attention; (2) It allows you to check out possible misunderstandings;
3 (3) For the speaker, it feels great to know that the listener is hearing what
4 you have to say; and (4) It helps keep conflict from getting out of hand. It
5 is hard to stay angry with someone who is sincerely trying to understand what
6 you are saying. When your spouse knows that you understand his or her point
7 of view, it is much more likely that you will be able to deal with the
8 situation in a way that is good for both of you.

9

10 DEALING CONSTRUCTIVELY WITH DISAGREEMENTS AND CONFLICT

11 Every couple faces problems in their marriage that need to be resolved.
12 Problems themselves do not cause distress in marriage. It is how couples
13 handle problems that matter. Early in marriage, spouses often avoid
14 discussing "hot-button" issues because they do not want to upset their newly
15 formed union. Soon after marriage, many couples become busy with work,
16 parenting, or other obligations. The demands of the moment may seem more
17 important than issues in the marriage. Yet, building a marriage requires
18 making many decisions and planning for the future. Having good communication
19 skills, being able to discuss and work out plans together, helps planning go
20 more smoothly. Discussing, negotiating, and arriving at agreements that are
21 satisfying to both spouses are crucial to keeping your marriage on the right
22 track.

23

24 DANGER SIGNALS: SIGNS OF TROUBLE AHEAD

25 Couples risk big future problems when (1) They are not able to handle
26 conflicts constructively; (2) Little disagreements quickly become big "blow-
27 ups"; (3) Arguments, once started, are hard to stop; (4) Spouses often
28 experience emotional conflicts; (5) Over the long term, spouses avoid dealing
29 with significant issues; (6) Spouses often put down or insult one another;
30 and (7) During conflicts, one spouse withdraws or avoids dealing with the
31 issue. When people withdraw or avoid dealing with disagreements, they
32 usually are trying to avoid conflict, not their spouses. Also, when people
33 keep bringing up issues, they usually are not trying to nag or pick a fight.
34 They are trying to find a way to connect with their spouses. If you notice
35 some of these danger signs in your own relationship, you should work on
36 communication with your spouse. To have good communication, both spouses

1 must feel emotionally safe, not vulnerable or on the defensive. A first step
2 is to listen to your spouse. By listening carefully, you will go a long way
3 toward improving your couple communication. Be polite in talks with your
4 spouse. Treat your spouse as you would a very valued friend. When you have
5 something negative or critical to say, find the most polite way to say it.
6 When you express your criticism politely, you increase the chances that your
7 spouse will actually hear what you have to say.

8 9 UNDERSTANDING EXPECTATIONS

10 In the early years of marriage, it is important to recognize what really
11 matters to you and your spouse. Talking with one another about your values,
12 beliefs, and voices" or "don't argue in front of the kids"); (3) Who has more
13 "say" or whether there should be "equal say" in the marriage; (4)
14 Expectations about sex; (5) Who should do what around the house; and (6) How
15 finances should be handled. Many spouses think their spouses' expectations
16 are similar to their own. Actually, it is more likely that you have
17 different expectations. Remember, it is how you handle your differences that
18 count. Working through disagreements creates intimacy and trust in your
19 marriage. Handling conflict lays the groundwork for satisfying and
20 fulfilling marriages.

21 22 23 DEVELOPING TEAMWORK AND FRIENDSHIP IN MARRIAGE

24 Spouses often say they want their spouse to be their best friend.
25 Friendship is part of your marriage relationship. Friends listen to each
26 other, show respect for each other's opinions, and are truly interested in
27 each other's lives. Friends talk about their interests, dreams, and plans,
28 and discuss what is important to them. Life after marriage makes it harder to
29 keep time for friendship. As life gets expectations builds your
30 relationship. Expectations play a big role in determining how satisfied we
31 are in life and with our relationships. Expectations include feelings,
32 desires, anticipations about life, relationships, "how the world works," and
33 what is likely to happen in the future. Our expectations shape the meanings
34 we give to our spouse's words and actions, and how we react to our spouse's
35 behavior. When we are happy in our relationship, we tend to see only the
36 positive. When we are unhappy, we tend to see only the negative, and it

1 becomes difficult to see our spouse's good aspects. It is important to
2 understand and talk about expectations. Expectations include: (1) How
3 communication should take place in relationships; (2) How husbands and wives
4 should handle conflicts and disagreements (such as "never raise busier, and
5 issues come up, friendship may suffer. However, keeping friendship alive is
6 one of the best tools for a successful marriage. Friends work as a team,
7 making life easier and more fun. Make time for "friendship talk" with your
8 spouse, focusing on each other's work, dreams, and interests.

9 10 MARRIAGE AS A BALANCING ACT

11 Individuals have many different roles in their married lives. These
12 roles include work and family, being a spouse and a parent, and keeping a
13 sense of self while also being part of a couple. It is important to keep a
14 balance between these sometimes-competing roles. Doing too much of one often
15 comes at the expense of another.

16 17 RECOGNIZING WHEN YOU NEED HELP

18 What are signs of marital distress? If you often have communication
19 problems, if your arguments are more destructive than constructive, and
20 especially if your disagreements lead to pushing or shoving or other kinds of
21 "physical" behavior, it may be helpful to get assistance.

22 23 WHERE TO LOOK FOR HELP

24 If you or your spouse ever need help of any kind, knowing where to look is
25 important. Family and friends can provide support. Often, though, expert
26 help is useful. There are many highly qualified professionals to help you
27 decide if you need assistance, and what kind of assistance might be most
28 helpful. There are many resources to help develop skills and improve your
29 marriage. Investigate programs and counseling offered by: (1) Community
30 mental health centers, (2) Religious organizations and spiritual leaders, (3)
31 Relationship enhancement programs (4) Marriage and family therapists. Many
32 of these resources are available free of charge or on a sliding fee scale.
33 All couples have the potential to succeed in making a wonderful marriage. It
34 does not happen naturally. It takes a lot of effort. The most successful
35 relationships are ones that spouses continually work to improve.

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/s/ Lamoureux