



How to Care for Traumatized Children

[CS/SB 1666](#) is the Senate's comprehensive child protection bill. The Senate Appropriations Committee postponed its vote on the bill on Thursday, in part because of the controversy caused by a provision in the bill stating that, "Reasonable efforts shall include short-term placement in a group home with the ability to accommodate sibling groups if such a placement is available."

Legislators are often faced with issues requiring them to craft a delicate balance between measures on which reasonable people can differ. In this case, the issue is whether the benefits of keeping siblings together in group homes with multiple children and little chance of fostering meaningful relationships with caring adults outweigh the benefits of providing children an opportunity to bond with and be supported by caring foster parents.

CS/SB 1666 is on its way to passing the Senate. This question will be answered when it is passed out of the Appropriations Committee in coming days.

Human trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery involving exploitation of persons for commercial sex or forced labor. The U.S. Department of State estimates that as many as 27 million victims are being trafficked worldwide at any given time, and that there were approximately 40,000 victims being trafficked in the United States in 2012. Florida is estimated to have the third highest rate of human trafficking in the United States, following New York and California.

Safe houses are group residential homes for sexually exploited children who have been adjudicated dependent or delinquent and need to reside in a secure residential facility.

[CS/CS/HB 7141](#) is a House bill intended to address services to help victims of human trafficking. Among many others, the bill authorizes the Department of Children and Families to establish a "secure safe house" with no more than 15 beds that has security features to prevent any entry into or exit from the facility or its grounds without the involvement of staff. The bill specifies that these features may include, but are not limited to, walls, fencing, gates, and locking doors.

In other words, the child could be locked in and not let out unless approved by staff.

Once again, a delicate balance. Should the state lock a badly traumatized child in a facility – primarily to keep the child from running away and back to the streets – to protect the child, or should less restrictive environments that remove the veil of control and subjugation under which the child has been living be used?

On Thursday, the House Health and Human Services Committee answered that question by removing secure safe house provisions from the bill.