

House Moves Child Protection Forward

The intent of [PCB HFS 14-03](#) as stated in the staff analysis is to:

- enhance the quality of the child protection workforce and its leadership;
- provide for increased transparency and expert review and consultation to improve Department of Children and Families (DCF) and broader child welfare system functioning;
- address gaps in law and procedure that put children at risk and deprive them of relationships with important people in their lives;
- mandate a sensitive and informed response when parents of medically fragile children are accused of medical neglect or otherwise become involved in the child welfare system; and
- update statutes relating to the community based care system to reflect the maturity of that system.

Among many others, the 119-page bill:

- creates an assistant secretary for child welfare within DCF;
- amends the goals of the child welfare system to focus on child safety as a paramount concern while having the least intrusive investigation;
- requires treatment to address developmental as well as social and emotional needs;
- ensures parents provide not only names of family members, but medical and educational information;
- requires DCF to maintain a program of family-centered services and supports for medically complex children;
- creates critical incident rapid response teams to conduct immediate investigations of deaths or other serious incidents to identify the root causes and determine the need for policy changes;
- requires public disclosure on DCF's website of basic facts related to all deaths of children reported to the child abuse hotline;
- requires the child protection team evaluating a report of medical neglect to involve a physician with experience in treating children with the same condition;
- requires DCF to make reasonable efforts to keep siblings together when removed from their home, or to arrange for visitation;
- requires judicial review hearings for children to include information regarding sibling contact;
- requires review hearings for 17 year olds to include information regarding whether removal of the disability of nonage is in the best interest of the child;
- requires newly-hired child protective investigators, case managers, and supervisors to have either a degree in social work, a degree in a human services related field and 12 hours of



Legislative Link

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relevant coursework, or a degree in a human services related field and to complete 12 hours of relevant coursework (which may be in a specialized area) within three years; and

- establishes a tuition exemption program for child protective investigators, case managers and their supervisors working toward a degree in social work or completing additional relevant coursework.

The bill also fundamentally changes Florida's premier Community Based Care system by vesting in Community Alliances responsibility to:

- conduct needs assessments and establish community priorities;
- review the performance of DCF, sheriff's offices providing child protective services, and lead agencies;
- recommend a competitive procurement for the lead agency if performance is poor, and then to be involved in developing the procurement document; and
- promote community involvement.

The bill creates the Florida Institute for Child Welfare in the Florida State University School of Social Work and requires the Institute to, among others, convene a task force to recommend improvements to the child welfare system.

For additional information, please contact
the United Way of Florida at: (850) 488-8276.

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