

Committee on Children, Families, And Elder Affairs

CS/CS/HB 803 — Child Protection

by Health and Human Services Committee; Health and Human Services Access Subcommittee; and Rep. Diaz (CS/SB 2044 by Judiciary Committee; Children, Families, and Elder Affairs Committee and Senator Lynn)

The bill makes changes to numerous provisions in ch. 39, F.S., relating to the central abuse hotline, child protective investigations, and the dependency process. The bill redesigns the process of child protective services by strengthening the investigation process, streamlining activities, and providing a more focused framework for on-going services to be provided. Specifically, the bill:

- Amends the central abuse hotline procedures to provide that the hotline may accept a call from a parent or legal custodian seeking assistance for themselves when the call does not meet the statutory requirement of abuse, abandonment or neglect;
- Allows the Department of Children and Family Services (DCF or department) to discontinue an investigation if it is determined that a false report of abuse, abandonment or neglect has been filed;
- Requires the department to maintain one electronic child welfare case file for each child;
- Requires child protective investigators (CPIs) to determine the need for immediate consultation with law enforcement personnel, child protection teams, and others prior to the commencement of an investigation;
- Eliminates the current bifurcated investigative process and provides for a single procedure for every case accepted for investigation; and
- Requires that monitoring of protective investigation reports are used to determine the quality and timeliness of safety assessments, and teamwork with other professionals and engagement with families.

In addition, the bill makes changes to ch. 39, F.S., protective injunction process to prevent child abuse and to mirror language in the civil injunction process in ch. 741, F.S., amends requirements relating to criminal background and records checks for individuals being considered for placement of a child, and amends provisions relating to termination of parental rights that apply to incarcerated parents. The bill provides specific circumstances in which the court may order maintaining and strengthening families as a permanency goal in a child's case plan when the child resides with a parent. Finally, the bill revises the number of times per year the Children and Youth Cabinet must meet.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2012.

Vote: Senate 35-0; House 119-0