

Committee on Children, Families, And Elder Affairs

CS/HB 7129 — Residential Services for Children

by Health and Human Services Committee; Healthy Families Subcommittee and Rep. Perry
(CS/SB 1682 by Children, Families, and Elder Affairs Committee and Senator Joyner)

The bill makes changes to residential facilities serving children, child abuse reporting requirements and makes several appropriations. Currently, residential facilities serving children are either licensed by the Department of Children and Families (DCF), registered with the Florida Association of Christian Child Caring Agencies (FACCCA), or registered with DOE as a boarding school.

The bill amends s. 409.175, F. S., to make a number of changes related to boarding schools including:

- Clarifying that boarding schools must receive one accreditation for academic programs and one accreditation for residential programs;
- Clarifying that boarding schools must register with DOE as a school which provides residential service for students;
- Setting a timeframe for applying for accreditation and directing DOE to remove boarding schools who fail to comply with these requirements from their website;
- Requiring boarding schools to report to DCF on progress made towards accreditation; and
- Requiring level 2 background screening of boarding school employees or contractors with direct student contact.

Under s. 409.176, F.S., residential child-caring agencies and family foster homes may not receive a child for continuing full-time care or custody without first registering with a “qualified association.” The only such association is the FACCCA. The bill amends s. 409.176, F.S, related to residential child-caring agencies and family foster homes. Revisions include:

- Adding a timeframe of 24 hours for the “qualified association” to notify DCF when a specified violation occurs which threatens harm to any child or constitutes an emergency requiring immediate action;
- Setting a timeframe of 3 days for the qualified association to notify DCF of facilities who are not licensed or properly registered for residential child care; and
- Granting DCF the authority to fine the qualified association for failure to comply with statutory requirements.

The bill amends s. 39.201, F.S., creating the following two exceptions to the requirement that any person who knows, or has reasonable cause to suspect that a child is abused by an adult other than a parent, legal custodian, caregiver, or other person responsible for the child’s welfare report such knowledge or suspicion to the hotline:

- An officer or employee of a law enforcement agency is not required to provide notice to the hotline when an incident of suspected child abuse by an adult other than a parent, legal custodian or other person responsible for the child's welfare under investigation by law enforcement was originally reported to law enforcement by the hotline through electronic transfer; and
- The central abuse hotline is not required to electronically transfer calls and reports to the county sheriff's office if the incident of alleged child abuse by an adult other than a parent, legal custodian or other person responsible for the child's welfare was originally reported to the hotline by the county sheriff's office or another law enforcement agency.

The bill also provides for an appropriation for three programs:

- \$3 million in recurring general revenue for a rural primary care residency program at Sacred Heart Hospital to include family physicians and pediatricians;
- \$250,000 in nonrecurring general revenue to the Department of Health for a Safe Haven for Newborns program; and
- \$200,000 in nonrecurring general revenue to the Department of Health for St. Johns Bosco Clinic.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2013.

Vote: Senate 39-0; House 110-6