

Committee on Children, Families, and Elder Affairs

CS/SB 1326 — Child Welfare

by Appropriations Committee and Senators Simpson and Rouson

The bill makes several changes to the child welfare programs administered by the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to promote accountability and improve program performance. The bill also seeks to increase the use of faith-based organizations in the delivery of services.

To improve accountability, the bill establishes the Office of Quality within DCF to measure and monitor the performance of agency programs whether provided directly by DCF or through contracts with local service providers. The office must set performance metrics and standards, improve the ability of DCF to analyze program performance data, and recommend initiatives to correct deficiencies. Such initiatives could include enhanced monitoring, corrective action plans, required technical assistance, and financial penalties.

The bill requires certain Sheriffs' Offices that conduct child protective investigations to follow the DCF child welfare practice model. DCF is to collaborate with all Sheriffs' Offices that conduct child protective investigations to develop a monitoring program to assess such services. The monitoring program must include case reviews based on a random selection of child welfare cases.

The bill revises the authority of DCF to contract for children's legal services in the child welfare system and requires increased oversight of contracted attorneys.

The bill directs DCF to develop a statewide accountability system for child welfare. The new accountability system must use a grading scheme to monitor performance in each region.

The bill establishes two 2-year pilot projects to improve child welfare services in the sixth and thirteenth judicial circuits. DCF must set performance metrics and standards for the pilot projects, monitor performance, and based on performance, award incentive funding to the community based care lead agency.

The bill expands the functions of the Florida Institute for Child Welfare (Institute) to inform, train, and engage social work students for a successful career in child welfare. The bill directs the Institute to work with the FSU College of Social Work to redesign the social work curriculum to enable postsecondary students to learn from real-world child welfare cases. Under the bill, the Institute must design and implement a professional development curriculum for the current child welfare workforce by July 1, 2021. The bill requires DCF, in collaboration with the Institute, to develop an expanded career ladder for child protective investigators.

The bill encourages the involvement of community-based and faith-based organizations in the local system of care. Local community alliances that advise DCF on local human services must now include a representative of a faith-based organization. Community-based care lead agencies must assign an employee to serve as a liaison to work with faith-based organizations. The bill

also requires DCF to implement programs to prevent and mitigate the impact of secondary traumatic stress and burnout among child protective investigators. These three components of the bill have a short title of “State of Hope Act.”

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2020.

Vote: Senate 39-0; House 117-0