

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
FINAL BILL ANALYSIS**

BILL #:	CS/HB 749	FINAL HOUSE FLOOR ACTION:		
SUBJECT/SHORT TITLE	Adoption Benefits	116	Y's 0	N's
SPONSOR(S):	Children, Families & Seniors Subcommittee; Combee and others	GOVERNOR'S ACTION:		Approved
COMPANION BILLS:	CS/SB 780			

SUMMARY ANALYSIS

CS/HB 749 passed the House on April 20, 2017, and subsequently passed the Senate on May 2, 2017.

In Florida, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) provides child welfare services, including adoption services, through community-based care lead agencies contracted by DCF.

Adoption is a method of achieving permanency for children who have suffered abuse, neglect, or abandonment and who are unable to be reunified with their parents. In 2015, the Legislature reestablished an adoption benefit program within DCF for state employees who adopt children from the foster care system. Qualifying adoptive employees receive a one-time benefit of \$10,000 for the adoption of a child with special needs and \$5,000 for the adoption of a child who does not have such needs.

A "qualifying adoptive employee" includes those individuals who are regular (not temporary) employees, either full- or part-time, of a state agency, which is defined to include school districts, but not charter schools or the Florida Virtual School (FLVS).

In order for an adoptive parent to qualify for the adoption benefit program for state employees, the adoptive parent must meet the requirements set out in statute at the time the adoption takes place.

The bill amends the definition of "qualifying adoptive employee" in s. 409.1664, F.S., to include employees of charter schools granted charter status pursuant to s. 1002.33, F.S., and the FLVS, established under s. 1002.37, F.S. This allows these employees to qualify to receive the incentive monetary benefit for adopting a child from the child welfare system, provided funds are available and other requirements of rule and law are met. The bill makes other technical changes to incorporate the broadened eligibility.

Additionally, the bill creates a clause to ensure that charter or FLVS employees who were employees of a charter school or the FLVS on or after July 1, 2015, and adopted a child through the child welfare system during that time may still apply for the monetary benefit.

The bill has a significant but indeterminate, negative fiscal impact on DCF, which can be absorbed within existing resources, and no fiscal impact on local governments.

The bill was approved by the Governor on June 23, 2017, ch. 2017-140, L.O.F., and will become effective on July 1, 2017.

This document does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill sponsor or House of Representatives.

STORAGE NAME: h0749z1.CFS

DATE: June 26, 2017

I. SUBSTANTIVE INFORMATION

A. EFFECT OF CHANGES:

Present Situation

Child Welfare System Adoptions

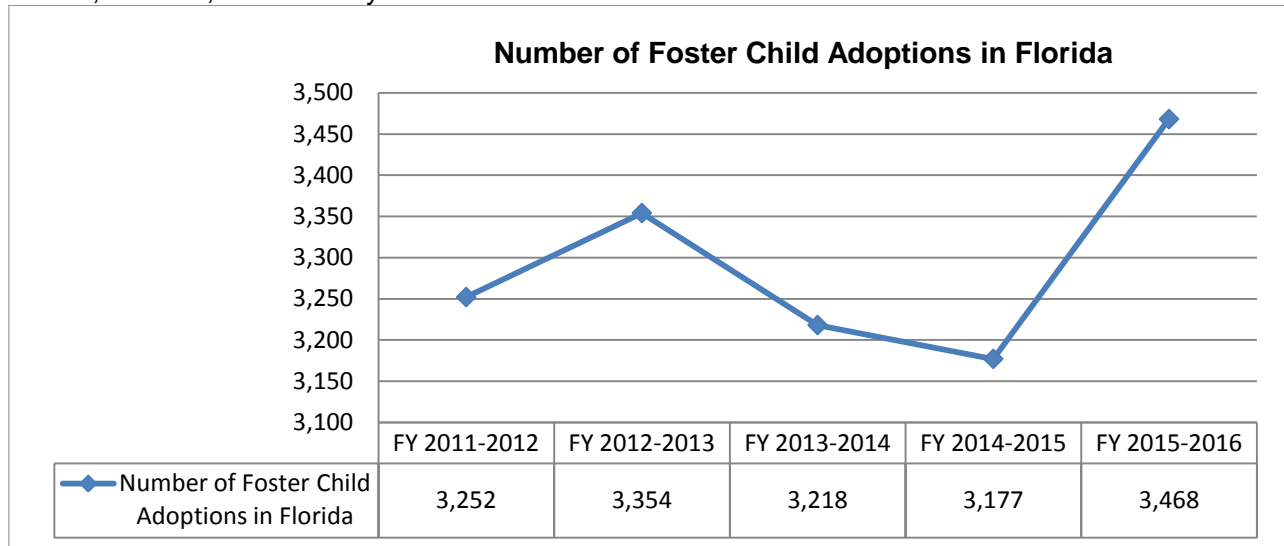
In Florida, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) provides child welfare services.¹ Statute requires child welfare services, including adoption services, to be delivered through community-based care (CBC) lead agencies contracted by DCF.² For example, CBC's provide pre- and post-adoption services and administer maintenance adoption subsidies which provide ongoing financial support for children adopted from the foster care system.

Adoption is a method of achieving permanency for children who have suffered abuse, neglect, or abandonment and who are unable to be reunified with their parents. Research indicates that children generally have better outcomes through adoption than through placement in long-term foster care.³

To become a licensed adoptive parent, an individual or couple must complete a licensing study class and complete a homestudy.⁴ The typical time frame is less than nine months for the entire process, and there is no cost to adopt a child from the child welfare system through a CBC.⁵

Statistics on Florida Foster Care Adoption

During FY 2015-2016, 3,468 adoptions of children within the child welfare system were finalized in Florida. Over the last 5 federal fiscal years, the number of finalized adoptions in Florida has ranged from 3,177 to 3,468 annually.⁶



¹ S. 20.19(4)(a)3., F.S

² S. 409.986(1), F.S

³ Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, *Keeping the Promise: Critical Need for Post-Adoption Services to Enable Children and Families to Succeed*, Oct. 2010, p. 8.

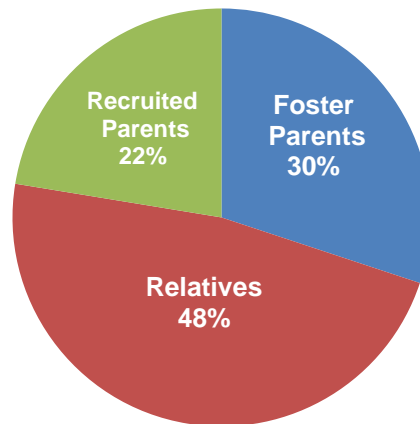
⁴ Department of Children and Families, *How Do I Become A Foster Parent?*, 2014, available at <http://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/foster-care/how-do-i> (last viewed May 8, 2017).

⁵ Department of Children and Families, *Frequently Asked Questions*, 2015, available at <http://www.adoptflorida.org/faq.shtml> (last viewed May 8, 2017).

⁶ DCF Adoption Incentive Annual Report, *Total Adoptions and the Number of Families who Adopted 1 or More Children by State Fiscal Year*, Appendix A, November 2016, available at <http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/programs/childwelfare/docs/2016LMRs/Adoption%20Incentive%20Annual%20Rpt%20plus%20attachments.pdf> (last viewed May 8, 2017).

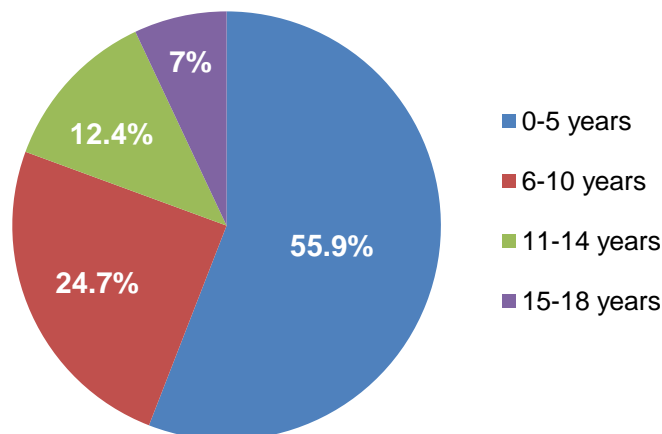
The vast majority of children adopted in FY 2015-16 were adopted by either relatives (47.50%) or foster parents (30.08%). Recruited parents comprised 22.42% of adoptions.⁷

Percentage of Adoptions by Type of Adoptive Family, SFY 2015-2016



Younger children in the child welfare system tend to be adopted more often than older children.^{8, 9}

Age of Children Adopted in Florida in 2013



Currently in Florida, there are approximately 14,000 children in foster care. As of June 2015, DCF reported there were 5,288 children with a primary goal of adoption,¹⁰ and approximately 750 children are waiting for permanent placement without identified families.¹¹ Of the almost 800 children in Florida waiting to be adopted, older children (especially teenagers) and sibling groups are likely to wait the longest for an adoptive family. About one-fifth of the children waiting to be adopted are teenagers, many of whom are part of sibling groups that include younger children. Nearly half the children waiting to be adopted are between the ages of six and twelve, while a third are under six.¹²

⁷ Office of Adoption and Child Protection, *2016 Annual Report*, January 2017, p. 55.

⁸ *Id.* at 50.

⁹ Children's Bureau, *Child Welfare Outcomes Report Data 2013, Florida*.

¹⁰ *Supra*, FN 7, at p. 51.

¹¹ AdoptUSKids, *Florida Foster Care and Adoption Guidelines*, available at <http://www.adoptuskids.org/adoption-and-foster-care/how-to-adopt-and-foster/state-information/florida#children> (last viewed May 8, 2017).

¹² DCF, *Florida's Adoption Information Guide: Adoption – What to Know*, available at <http://www.adoptflorida.com/information-guide.htm#know> (last viewed May 8, 2017).

State Employee Adoption Benefit

From 2000 through 2010, Florida offered an adoption benefit to state employees.¹³ The program provided a one-time cash benefit to employees of the state or a water management district who adopted a child. Qualifying employees adopting a child defined as a “special-needs child” under s. 409.166, F.S., were eligible to receive a monetary benefit of \$10,000 per child; qualifying employees adopting a child other than a special-needs child were eligible to receive a monetary benefit in the amount of \$5,000 per child.¹⁴ This program also authorized the benefit for private and foreign adoptions.

The law was amended in 2001 to restrict the program to state employees who adopted a child from the foster care system.¹⁵ The benefit program was expanded in 2007 to include county school district employees, community college and university employees, and instructional personnel employed by the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind as employees eligible to receive the benefit. The Legislature also transferred the program from the Department of Management Services (DMS) to DCF.¹⁶ The program ended in 2010 when the funding was ended and the statute was repealed.¹⁷

In 2015, the Legislature reestablished the adoption benefit program¹⁸ for state employees who adopt children from the foster care system beginning on July 1, 2015. Adoptive employees may receive a one-time benefit of \$10,000 for the adoption of a child with special needs as described in s. 409.166(2)(a)2., F.S., and \$5,000 for the adoption of a child who does not have such needs.¹⁹

For purposes of adoption through the child welfare system, a “special needs” child is defined in s. 409.166(2), F.S., as:

- A child whose permanent custody has been awarded to DCF or a licensed child-placing agency; and
- Who has established significant emotional ties with foster parents or is not likely to be adopted because he or she is:
 - Eight years of age or older;
 - Developmentally disabled;
 - Physically or emotionally handicapped;
 - Of black or racially mixed parentage; or
 - A member of a sibling group of any age, provided two or more members of a sibling group remain together for purposes of adoption; and
- For whom a reasonable but unsuccessful effort has been made to place the child without providing a maintenance subsidy, except when the child is being adopted by the child’s foster parents or relative caregivers.

In order for an adoptive parent to qualify for the adoption benefit program for state employees, he or she must meet the statutory requirements at the time the adoption takes place. A “qualifying adoptive employee” includes those individuals who are regular (not temporary) employees, either full- or part-time, of:

- A branch, department, or agency of state government for which the Chief Financial Officer processes payroll requisitions;²⁰

¹³ The term “employee of the state” is not defined in s. 110.152, F.S. (2000).

¹⁴ S. 110.152, F.S. (2000).

¹⁵ S. 110.152, F.S. (2001).

¹⁶ S. 409.1663, F.S. (2007).

¹⁷ Ch. 2010-158, Laws of Fla.

¹⁸ 65C-16.021 F.A.C. outlines the procedure for applying for the adoption benefits during the open enrollment period between the first business day of March and the last business day of April.

¹⁹ S. 409.1664, F.S. (2015).

²⁰ Email from BG Murphy, Deputy Legislative Affairs Director, Office of the Chief Financial Officer, RE: questions regarding HB 749 (March 3, 2017), on file with the Children, Families, and Seniors Subcommittee staff. The office of the Chief Financial Officer processes

- A state university or Florida College System institution as defined in s. 1000.21, F.S.;
- A school district unit as defined in s. 1000.30, F.S.;
- A water management district as defined in s. 373.019, F.S.; and
- The Florida School for the Deaf and Blind (limited to instructional personnel as defined in s. 1012.01, F.S.).²¹

As of June 30, 2016, there are approximately 115,002 state employees for whom the Chief Financial Officer processes payroll requisitions (including all employees for the School of the Deaf and Blind).²² In addition, as of the Fall 2015 semester, there are approximately 46,630 State University System employees,²³ and approximately 45,294 Florida College System employees.²⁴ For FY 2016-2017, there are a total of 2,790 Water Management District full-time employees (FTE),²⁵ and as of FY 2015-2016, there are approximately 345,811 school district employees in Florida.²⁶ This is a total of approximately 555,527 persons who may potentially apply for the adoption benefits for state employees.

Benefits are provided on a first-come, first-served, basis, limited by the amount of the appropriation each year. In FY 2015-2016, the first year of the reinstated program, 139 employees were approved for a total of \$1.3 million in incentives awarded of an appropriated amount of \$3 million.²⁷ The Legislature appropriated \$4,265,090, in FY 2016-2017, which includes the reappropriated unspent funding from FY 2015-2016.²⁸ The open enrollment period for FY 2016-2017 began March 1 and runs through April 28.

Charter Schools

Charter schools are authorized by s. 1002.33, F.S., and are tuition-free public schools created through an agreement or "charter" typically between the school and the local district school board. This agreement gives the charter school a measure of expanded freedom relative to traditional public schools in return for a commitment to higher standards of accountability. Since 1996, Florida charter schools have increased parental options in public education and provided innovative learning opportunities for students.²⁹

Every charter school has a nonprofit governing board that is responsible for the operation of the school.³⁰ Section 1002.33(12)(i), F.S., states that, "a charter school shall organize as, or be operated by, a nonprofit organization;" however, "a charter school may be operated by a municipality or other

payroll for the following agencies: Legislature, Auditor General, Judicial Administration, State Courts Administration, Governor's Office, Department of Lottery, Department of Environmental Protection, Department of Economic Opportunity, Legal Affairs, Department of Agriculture, Department of Financial Services, Department of State, Department of Education, School for the Deaf and Blind, Department of Veterans Affairs, Department of Transportation, Department of Citrus, Department of Children and Families, Public Service Commission, Department of Military Affairs, Department of Health, Department of Elder Affairs, Agency for Persons with Disabilities, Agency for Health Care Administration, Department of Corrections, Florida Department of Law Enforcement, Department of Management Services, Division of Administrative Hearings, State Technology Office, Department of Revenue, Department of Highway Safety & Motor Vehicles, Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission, Florida Commission on Offender Review, Department of Business and Professional Regulation, and Department of Juvenile Justice.

²¹ S. 409.1664(1)(b)-(c), F.S.

²² Florida Department of Management Services, *2015-2016 State Personnel System Annual Workforce Report*, p. 15, available at http://www.dms.myflorida.com/content/download/130626/811681/2015-16_Annual_Workforce_Report_FINAL_2-22-17.pdf (last viewed May 8, 2017).

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ Florida Department of Education, *The Fact Book: Report for the Florida College System*, 2016, p. 6, available at <http://fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/15267/urlt/FactBook2016.pdf> (last viewed May 8, 2017).

²⁵ Email from Jack Furney, Deputy Director for the Office of Water Policy, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, RE: FTE Information (March 6, 2017), on file with Children, Families, and Seniors Subcommittee staff.

²⁶ Email from Tanya Cooper, Director of Government Relations, Department of Education, RE: school district employees (March 6, 2017), on file with Children, Families, and Seniors Subcommittee staff.

²⁷ Email from Michael Wickersheim, Director of Legislative Affairs, Department of Children and Families, RE: Follow Up (Feb. 14, 2017), on file with Children, Families, and Seniors Subcommittee staff.

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ Florida Department of Education, *Florida's Charter Schools*, October 2016, available at http://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/18353/urlt/Charter_Oct_2016.pdf (last reviewed May 8, 2017).

³⁰ Email from Tanya Cooper, Director of Government Relations, Department of Education, RE: questions for HB 749 (March 2, 2017), on file with Children, Families, and Seniors Subcommittee staff.

public entity.” Therefore, a charter school may be a private or public employer and as a public employer, a charter school may participate in the Florida Retirement System.³¹

In the 2015-2016 school year there were 26,187 charter school staff, while there are currently 21,408 charter school staff for the 2016-2017 school year.³²

The Florida Virtual School

The Florida Virtual School (FLVS) is established in s. 1002.37, F.S., for the development and delivery of online and distance learning education. All school districts in Florida offer online schools, programs and/or courses. FLVS teachers must hold Florida teaching certificates, and the curriculum must align with state standards. Full-time FLVS students participate in state assessments, and full-time schools and programs receive school grades through Florida’s accountability system.³³ FLVS is governed by a board of trustees made up of seven members who are appointed by the Governor. The board of trustees is a public agency.³⁴

In the 2015-2016 school year, there were 2,099 FLVS staff, while there are currently 2,149 FLVS staff for the 2016-2017 school year.³⁵

Effect of Proposed Changes

The bill amends the definition of “qualifying adoptive employee” in s. 409.1664, F.S., to include employees of charter schools granted charter status pursuant to s. 1002.33, F.S., or the Florida Virtual School, established under s. 1002.37, F.S. This will allow these employees to qualify to receive the incentive monetary benefit for adopting a child from the child welfare system, provided funds are available and other requirements of rule and law are met. The bill makes other technical changes to the section to incorporate the bill’s expansion of eligibility.

Additionally, the bill creates a retroactive clause to ensure that charter or FLVS employees who were employees of a charter school or the FLVS on or after July 1, 2015, and adopted a child from DCF during that time can still apply for the monetary benefit.

The number of persons who can potentially apply for the adoption benefits for state employees will grow by approximately 4 percent.

II. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE GOVERNMENT:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

See Fiscal Comments.

³¹ S. 1002.33(12)(i), F.S.

³² Email from Tanya Cooper, Director of Government Relations, Department of Education, RE: HB 749 (February 21, 2017), on file with the Children, Families, and Seniors Subcommittee staff.

³³ Florida Department of Education, *Florida’s Public Virtual Education Programs*, November 2016, available at http://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/5606/urlt/Virtual_Nov_2016.pdf (last reviewed May 8, 2017).

³⁴ S. 1002.37(2), F.S.

³⁵ Supra, FN 32.

B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

None.

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

The bill will provide cash benefits to employees of charter schools or the Florida Virtual School who adopt a qualifying child from the child welfare system provided they meet all requirements and funding is available.

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

Funding is accessed on a first-come, first served basis. If insufficient funding is available for a qualifying adoptive employee to receive a benefit, he or she will not be provided an incentive but may reapply the next year.

The program received an initial appropriation of \$3,000,000 in Fiscal Year 2015-16, of which only \$1,469,145 was disbursed for 139 beneficiaries. For Fiscal Year 2016-17, the program received another \$2,750,000 appropriation, of which only \$15,765 has been disbursed as of February 2017. It is anticipated that existing resources can absorb an increase of eligible beneficiaries pursuant to this bill.