Committee on Children, Families, and Elder Affairs

CS/SB 7012 — Child Welfare

by Fiscal Policy Committee and Children, Families, and Elder Affairs Committee

The bill creates additional requirements for the collection and maintenance of data on the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) and requires a study of residential bed capacity and a gap analysis of non-residential services for victims of CSEC.

The bill allows the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to waive operational requirements and issue provisional certificates to new domestic violence centers if there is an emergency need for such a center and the domestic violence center fulfills other eligibility requirements.

The bill allows the DCF to grant limited exemptions to disqualification from background screenings due to certain disqualifying offenses, and limits individuals who receive the exemption to working with specific populations.

The bill requires the DCF to create a Child Protective Investigator (CPI) and case manager recruitment program for individuals who have previously held public safety and service positions and have a continued desire to serve their communities. The bill also requires the DCF to collaborate with community-based care (CBC) lead agencies to create a referral system for case manager applicants. The bill also requires the DCF to convene a case management workforce workgroup composed of child welfare professionals to address current policy gaps and develop actionable recommendations to improve case management.

The bill requires the DCF to create a pilot program for treatment foster care, or a substantially similar evidence-based program of professional foster care. This pilot program is intended to introduce a short-term, family-like placement option for children in foster care that have high resource indicators or children that are stepping down from a placement in an inpatient residential treatment. The bill requires specialized training requirements for foster parents and a 24 hour service to provide crisis intervention and placement stabilization services if needed.

The bill removes a recently added requirement for CBCs to post a fidelity bond to cover potential costs and penalties associated with board members' failures to disclose conflicts of interest. The bill also limits the liability of lead agency subcontractors for the acts or omissions of lead agencies or the DCF for contracts entered into or renewed after July 1, 2025.

The bill adds an exemption from state gift laws for incentives provided to state employees participating in child welfare research and evaluation projects performed by the Florida Institute for Child Welfare.

If approved by the Governor, or allowed to become law without the Governor's signature, these provisions take effect July 1, 2025, except as otherwise expressly provided in the bill.
Vote: Senate 37-0; House 98-0