

Committee on Criminal Justice

CS/CS/HB 7055 — Juvenile Justice

by Judiciary Committee; Justice Appropriations Subcommittee; Criminal Justice Subcommittee; and Rep. Pilon and others (CS/CS/SB 700 by Appropriations Committee; Judiciary Committee; and Senators Bradley and Detert)

The bill amends ch. 985, F.S., which provides a framework for the juvenile justice system in Florida and delineates duties and responsibilities of the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ). Specifically, the bill enhances the state's focus on serious juvenile offenders, adopts measures to reduce recidivism, and increases care of juvenile offenders in the department's custody.

To provide an increased focus on serious cases and public safety, the bill:

- Requires the DJJ to notify a law enforcement agency and the victim of a juvenile offender who has escaped or absconded while in custody during commitment;
- Grants the court jurisdiction over a juvenile sex offender under the DJJ supervision until he or she is 21 years old;
- Encourages the DJJ to develop evening-reporting centers to better support children in nonsecure detention;
- Authorizes the court to order juvenile offenders who commit technical violations of probation into an alternative consequence program; and
- Waives fingerprinting requirements for children committing offenses that may only result in a civil citation.

To reduce recidivism through recognizing the special needs of children and the need for transitional services, the bill:

- Authorizes intake personnel to incorporate mental health, substance abuse, and psychosexual evaluations as part of the intake process;
- Establishes trauma-informed care as part of the DJJ model;
- Encourages placement of children in their home communities to facilitate family and community support;
- Enhances the transition-to-adult services offered and lifts the age restriction of youth clients eligible for service; and
- Requires the DJJ to focus on prevention services through providing academic and community support for at-risk youth.

To improve care to juveniles in the residential custody of the DJJ, the bill:

- Combines the commitment levels of low-risk and moderate-risk residential commitments into the newly-designated nonsecure residential commitment level and caps the number of beds authorized per facility at 90 beds, rather than the current cap of 165 beds;

- Creates a criminal offense of willful and malicious neglect, punishable as a third degree felony if the employee's lack of care does not result in harm to the juvenile offender in DJJ custody and as a second degree felony if great bodily harm results; and
- Allows for prosecution under the new criminal offense for any victim in commitment care, not just children under the age of 18.

To increase performance accountability, the bill requires the DJJ to adopt a system to measure performance based on recidivism rates of providers and programs, and to annually report findings to the Legislature.

The bill codifies a provision found in the 2013-2014 Implementing Bill for the General Appropriations Act which caps the allowable rate for hospital health services provided to juveniles at 110 percent of the Medicare allowable rate, with a cap of 125 percent in limited cases.

This bill grants the DJJ greater flexibility in the assessment process by allowing a DJJ employee other than a juvenile probation officer to participate in intake, screenings, and assessments.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2014, except that the newly created willful and malicious neglect offense takes effect October 1, 2014.

Vote: Senate 38-0; House 115-0