

**STORAGE NAME:** h0599a.cf  
**DATE:** March 23, 1999

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
COMMITTEE ON  
CHILDREN & FAMILIES  
ANALYSIS**

**BILL #:** HB 599  
**RELATING TO:** Dependency Mediation Services  
**SPONSOR(S):** Representative Casey  
**COMPANION BILL(S):** SB 162 (Identical)

**ORIGINATING COMMITTEE(S)/COMMITTEE(S) OF REFERENCE:**

- (1) CHILDREN & FAMILIES YEAS 8 NAYS 0
  - (2) FAMILY LAW & CHILDREN
  - (3) JUDICIARY
  - (4) CRIMINAL JUSTICE APPROPRIATIONS
  - (5)
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**I. SUMMARY:**

House Bill 599 amends s. 39.4075, F.S., to require each circuit to establish a dependency mediation program. In addition, the bill provides that funding for the dependency mediation programs must come from general revenue. It requires the court to advise the parties that they are responsible for contributing to the cost of the dependency mediation to the extent of their ability to pay.

The bill has a fiscal impact of \$1,467,549 in FY 99/00.

II. SUBSTANTIVE ANALYSIS:

A. PRESENT SITUATION:

Under current law, a party may request the court to refer the parties in a dependency proceeding to mediation in accordance with chapter 44, F.S., relating to mediation, and with Florida Supreme Court rules and procedures. See 39.4075, F.S. This provision only applies to those courts in counties where there is an existing dependency mediation program.

Thirteen of the 20 judicial circuits offer some form of dependency mediation services which actually impact 15 of the 67 counties in Florida. According to the Office of State Courts Administrator, those counties rely on a variety of local, county, state or federal funding sources of which very few are dependable or long term. Neither agency representatives (e.g., Department of Children & Families) nor volunteer personnel (Guardian Ad Litem) pay for mediation services. Most parties involved in dependency proceedings are indigent, therefore the courts are rarely able to assess fees to offset the cost of providing mediation services.

B. EFFECT OF PROPOSED CHANGES:

House Bill 599 amends s. 39.4075, F.S., to require each circuit to establish a dependency mediation program. In addition, the bill provides that funding for the dependency mediation programs must come from general revenue. It requires the court to advise the parties that they are responsible for contributing to the cost of the dependency mediation to the extent of their ability to pay.

C. APPLICATION OF PRINCIPLES:

1. Less Government:

a. Does the bill create, increase or reduce, either directly or indirectly:

(1) any authority to make rules or adjudicate disputes?

Yes. The bill requires that each circuit establish a dependency mediation program to provide an option for parties to resolve disputes that arise as a result of dependency proceedings under chapter 39.

(2) any new responsibilities, obligations or work for other governmental or private organizations or individuals?

All circuit courts are required to implement a dependency mediation program.

(3) any entitlement to a government service or benefit?

N/A

b. If an agency or program is eliminated or reduced:

(1) what responsibilities, costs and powers are passed on to another program, agency, level of government, or private entity?

N/A

(2) what is the cost of such responsibility at the new level/agency?

N/A

(3) how is the new agency accountable to the people governed?

N/A

2. Lower Taxes:

a. Does the bill increase anyone's taxes?

N/A

b. Does the bill require or authorize an increase in any fees?

N/A

c. Does the bill reduce total taxes, both rates and revenues?

N/A

d. Does the bill reduce total fees, both rates and revenues?

N/A

e. Does the bill authorize any fee or tax increase by any local government?

N/A

3. Personal Responsibility:

a. Does the bill reduce or eliminate an entitlement to government services or subsidy?

N/A

b. Do the beneficiaries of the legislation directly pay any portion of the cost of implementation and operation?

Yes. The court must advise the parties that they are responsible for contributing to the cost of the dependency mediation to the extent of their ability to pay.

4. Individual Freedom:

a. Does the bill increase the allowable options of individuals or private organizations/associations to conduct their own affairs?

Yes.

- b. Does the bill prohibit, or create new government interference with, any presently lawful activity?

N/A

5. Family Empowerment:

- a. If the bill purports to provide services to families or children:

- (1) Who evaluates the family's needs?

N/A

- (2) Who makes the decisions?

N/A

- (3) Are private alternatives permitted?

N/A

- (4) Are families required to participate in a program?

N/A

- (5) Are families penalized for not participating in a program?

N/A

- b. Does the bill directly affect the legal rights and obligations between family members?

N/A

- c. If the bill creates or changes a program providing services to families or children, in which of the following does the bill vest control of the program, either through direct participation or appointment authority:

- (1) parents and guardians?

N/A

- (2) service providers?

N/A

- (3) government employees/agencies?

N/A

D. STATUTE(S) AFFECTED:

Section 39.4075, F.S.

E. SECTION-BY-SECTION ANALYSIS:

Section 1. Amends s. 39.4075, F. S., 1998 Supplement.

Requires each circuit to establish a dependency mediation program to provide dependency mediation services in that circuit.

Requires dependency mediation programs be funded from general revenue funds.

Requires the court to advise the parties that they are responsible for contributing to the cost of the dependency mediation to the extent of their ability to pay.

Section 2. Provides that the act shall take effect July 1, 1999.

III. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT:

A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE AGENCIES/STATE FUNDS:

1. Non-recurring Effects:

See below.

2. Recurring Effects:

According to the Office of State Courts Administrator, the following fiscal impact is anticipated:

<i>A. Non-recurring or First Year Start-Up Effects</i>				
		<i>Year 99-00</i>	<i>Year 00-01</i>	<i>Year 01-02</i>
Revenues:		-0-	-0-	-0-
Expenditures	General Revenue: Operating Capital Outlay <u>Expenses</u> TOTAL:	\$91,200 \$45,576 \$136,776		
<i>B. Recurring or Annualized Continuation Effects</i>				
Revenues:		-0-	-0-	-0-
Expenditures	General Revenue: Salaries & Benefits (FTE 23.5) <sup>1</sup> OPS (Contract Services) <sup>2</sup> <u>Expenses</u> TOTAL	\$646,173, \$593,400 \$91,200 \$1,330,773	\$861,564 \$623,070 \$91,200 \$1,575,834	\$861,564 \$654,223 \$91,200 \$1,606,990
<i>C. Appropriation Consequences</i>				
	General Revenue	\$1,467,549	\$1,575,834	\$1,606,164

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<sup>1</sup>To handle case coordination and scheduling, positions are based on a funding formula of 1.0 FTE position for every 400 new petitions filed in single county circuits, and 1.0 FTE position for every 150 new petitions filed in multiple county circuits for a total of 23.50 FTEs. Petition filing data is based on 1997 filing (3,956) and assumes a conservative 5 percent increase in filings for years 00-01 and 01-02. Administrative Assistant Class I will also be needed. Standard amounts for operating capital outlay and expenses with new positions are included below. Possible future pay increases and cost-of-living allowances are not considered.

<sup>2</sup>OPS funds are needed to provide for contract mediators to mediate new filings at \$150 per case.

3. Long Run Effects Other Than Normal Growth:

N/A

4. Total Revenues and Expenditures:

N/A

B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AS A WHOLE:

1. Non-recurring Effects:

N/A

2. Recurring Effects:

N/A

3. Long Run Effects Other Than Normal Growth:

N/A

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

1. Direct Private Sector Costs:

N/A

2. Direct Private Sector Benefits:

The bill may have a positive impact on the client families by offering an alternative and potentially less costly means of resolving legal matters through mediation.

3. Effects on Competition, Private Enterprise and Employment Markets:

N/A

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

Florida voters recently adopted a Constitution Revision Commission amendment to Article V of the Florida Constitution to shift major costs of Florida's judicial system from the counties to the state. See Art. V, § 14, Fla. Const. The amendment provides a phase-in schedule established by general law to be fully effectuated by July 1, 2004. No formal review has yet been made as to what specific judicial areas need to be examined, or what judicial expenditures are to be included in the definition of "Article V costs" which would be assumed by the state. No formal study has yet been completed on those judicial resources being provided by each of the 67 counties, nor has any determination been made as to which judicial resources or court services should be made available statewide and otherwise funded by the state. Currently, each county draws on different federal, state, county, community or private sector resources to fund its primary judicial resources (direct relief to the judge of a judicial duty) and secondary judicial resources (indirect relief of judicial workload). The adoption of this bill would formally recognize the provision of dependency mediation services as a statewide judicial resource to be funded by the state.

IV. CONSEQUENCES OF ARTICLE VII, SECTION 18 OF THE FLORIDA CONSTITUTION:

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A. APPLICABILITY OF THE MANDATES PROVISION:

This bill does not require counties or municipalities to expend funds.

B. REDUCTION OF REVENUE RAISING AUTHORITY:

This bill does not reduce revenue raising authority.

C. REDUCTION OF STATE TAX SHARED WITH COUNTIES AND MUNICIPALITIES:

This bill does not reduce the percentage of a state tax shared with counties or municipalities.

V. COMMENTS:

VI. AMENDMENTS OR COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE CHANGES:

N/A

VII. SIGNATURES:

COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN & FAMILIES:

Prepared by:

Staff Director:

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Bob Barrios

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Bob Barrios