



1 permanency options, including long-term relative custody,  
2 guardianship, or adoption, and to provide additional placement  
3 options and incentives that will achieve permanency and  
4 stability for many children who are otherwise at risk of  
5 foster care placement ~~because of abuse, abandonment, or~~  
6 ~~neglect, but who may successfully be able to be placed by the~~  
7 ~~dependency court in the care of such relatives.~~  
8         (2)(a) The Department of Children and Family Services  
9 shall establish and operate the Relative Caregiver Program  
10 pursuant to eligibility guidelines established in this section  
11 as further implemented by rule of the department. The Relative  
12 Caregiver Program shall, within the limits of available  
13 funding, provide financial assistance to relatives who are  
14 within the fifth degree by blood or marriage to the parent or  
15 stepparent of a child and who are caring full-time for that  
16 child or a related child and any of his or her siblings in the  
17 role of substitute parent as a result of ~~a court's~~  
18 ~~determination of child abuse, neglect, or abandonment and~~  
19 ~~subsequent~~ placement with the relative pursuant to any court  
20 order by a state court of competent jurisdiction ~~this chapter.~~  
21 ~~Such placement may be either court-ordered temporary legal~~  
22 ~~custody to the relative pursuant to s. 39.508(9)(a)4., or~~  
23 ~~court-ordered placement in the home of a relative under~~  
24 ~~protective supervision of the department pursuant to s.~~  
25 ~~39.508(9)(a)3.~~ The Relative Caregiver Program shall offer  
26 financial assistance to caregivers who are relatives and who  
27 would be unable to serve in that capacity without the relative  
28 caregiver payment because of financial burden, thus exposing  
29 the child to the trauma of placement in a shelter or in foster  
30 care or exposing a relative child and its sibling or siblings  
31 to the trauma of separation from each other.

1           (b) Caregivers who are relatives and who receive  
2 assistance under this section must be capable, as determined  
3 by a home study, of providing a physically safe environment  
4 and a stable, supportive home for the children under their  
5 care, and must assure that the children's well-being is met,  
6 including, but not limited to, the provision of immunizations,  
7 education, and mental health services as needed.

8           (c) Relatives who qualify for and participate in the  
9 Relative Caregiver Program are not required to meet foster  
10 care licensing requirements under s. 409.175.

11           (d) Relatives who are caring for children placed with  
12 them by a the court, including children who are unrelated  
13 siblings of relative children also placed with them,~~pursuant~~  
14 ~~to this chapter~~ shall receive a special monthly relative  
15 caregiver benefit established by rule of the department. The  
16 amount of the special benefit payment shall be based on the  
17 child's age within a payment schedule established by rule of  
18 the department and subject to availability of funding. The  
19 statewide average monthly rate for children judicially placed  
20 with relatives who are not licensed as foster homes may not  
21 exceed 82 percent of the statewide average foster care rate,  
22 nor may the cost of providing the assistance described in this  
23 section to any relative caregiver exceed the cost of providing  
24 out-of-home care in emergency shelter or foster care.

25           (e) Children receiving cash benefits under this  
26 section are not eligible to simultaneously receive WAGES cash  
27 benefits under chapter 414.

28           (f) The date of entitlement to benefits under the  
29 Relative Caregiver Program is the date of authorization of  
30 payment or the 30th day after the submission of a signed and  
31 dated application for benefits, whichever occurs first. The

1 child is eligible for retroactive benefits to the date of  
2 entitlement if the application is not acted upon by the 30th  
3 day after submission of the signed and dated application for  
4 benefits.

5 ~~(g)(f)~~ Within available funding, the Relative  
6 Caregiver Program shall provide relative caregivers with  
7 family support and preservation services, flexible funds in  
8 accordance with s. 409.165, subsidized child care, and other  
9 available services in order to support the child's safety,  
10 growth, and healthy development. Children living with  
11 relative caregivers who are receiving assistance under this  
12 section shall be eligible for Medicaid coverage.

13 ~~(h)(g)~~ The department may use appropriate available  
14 state, federal, and private funds to operate the Relative  
15 Caregiver Program. The department may transfer TANF savings to  
16 the Title XX Social Services Block Grant in order to provide  
17 benefits under the Relative Caregiver Program. Any child  
18 receiving relative caregiver benefits is not subject to the  
19 provisions of the Work and Gain Economic Self-sufficiency  
20 (WAGES) Act. The child must be recertified as eligible for  
21 benefits under the Relative Caregiver Program once each year  
22 by the department.

23 Section 2. Paragraph (c) of subsection (4) of section  
24 239.117, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

25 239.117 Workforce development postsecondary student  
26 fees.--

27 (4) The following students are exempt from the payment  
28 of registration, matriculation, and laboratory fees:

29 (c) A student for whom the state is paying a foster  
30 care board payment pursuant to s. 409.145(3) or pursuant to  
31 parts II and III of chapter 39, or for whom the state is

1 paying a relative caregiver payment under s. 39.5085, for whom  
2 the permanency planning goal pursuant to ~~part III~~ of chapter  
3 39 is long-term foster care, custody to a foster parent or  
4 legal custodian on a permanent basis, long-term relative  
5 placement, guardianship, custody to a relative on a permanent  
6 basis, or independent living, or who is adopted from the  
7 Department of Children and Family Services after May 5, 1997.  
8 Such exemption includes fees associated with enrollment in  
9 vocational-preparatory instruction and completion of the  
10 college-level communication and computation skills testing  
11 program. Such exemption shall be available to any student  
12 adopted from the Department of Children and Family Services  
13 after May 5, 1997; however, the exemption shall be valid for  
14 no more than 4 years after the date of graduation from high  
15 school.

16           Section 3. The Department of Children and Family  
17 Services shall establish, or contract on a pilot-project basis  
18 with a privatized, community-based organization for the  
19 operation of the Relative Caregiver Program in one urban  
20 district. The contract terms must include the establishment of  
21 eligibility, the conduct of home studies, and the processing  
22 of payments. The department shall report to the Legislature by  
23 January 1, 2001, on the success of the pilot project in  
24 reducing delays in the application process and in serving  
25 eligible applicants.

26           Section 4. This act shall take effect July 1, 2000.  
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LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY

Provides legislative intent relating to the Relative Caregiver Program. Revises criteria for financial assistance to relatives caring for children under the program to include persons caring for a related child and siblings and to delete a requirement that the child's placement result from a court's determination of child abuse, neglect, or abandonment. Prescribes the date of entitlement for program benefits. Authorizes the Department of Children and Family Services to transfer TANF savings to the Title XX Social Services Block Grant to provide program benefits. Exempts children receiving relative caregiver benefits from the Work and Gain Economic Self-sufficiency (WAGES) Act. Exempts certain postsecondary students who are receiving caregiving services from paying registration, matriculation, and laboratory fees. Requires the department to establish a pilot Relative Caregiver Program. Requires a report to the Legislature.