

By the Committee on Children & Families and
 Representatives Russell, Byrd, Murman, Stafford, Fuller,
 Littlefield, Kelly, Fasano, Greenstein, Cantens, Chestnut and
 Bullard

1 A bill to be entitled
 2 An act relating to children; providing
 3 legislative findings; creating the Blind Babies
 4 Program within the Division of Blind Services
 5 of the Department of Labor and Employment
 6 Security; providing for community-based early
 7 intervention education for certain children who
 8 are blind or visually impaired and for their
 9 parents, families, and caregivers; prescribing
 10 program emphasis; providing for eligibility and
 11 authorizing copayments; requiring development
 12 of program outcomes, contract criteria, and
 13 performance measures; requiring a program
 14 review and report by the Office of Program
 15 Policy Analysis and Government Accountability;
 16 providing an appropriation; providing an
 17 effective date.

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 19 Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

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 21 Section 1. The Legislature finds that all children
 22 must have a healthy start in life, including babies who are
 23 visually impaired or blind. Early intervention services at the
 24 youngest age greatly improve a child's chances for success and
 25 self-sufficiency in life and reduce the severity of long-term
 26 disabilities. It is critical to teach infants and toddlers who
 27 are born or become blind or visually impaired, as well as to
 28 teach the parents, families, and caregivers of such children,
 29 the skills to assist them, so that these children do not miss
 30 critical developmental stages that are normally dependent on
 31 vision. This early intervention is also essential to ensure

1 that these children can access and benefit from other services
2 that assist, educate, train, and employ young people.

3 Section 2. (1) The Blind Babies Program is created
4 within the Division of Blind Services of the Department of
5 Labor and Employment Security to provide community-based early
6 intervention education to children from birth through 5 years
7 of age who are blind or visually impaired, as well as to their
8 parents, families, and caregivers, through community-based
9 provider organizations. The division shall enlist parents,
10 ophthalmologists, pediatricians, schools, and therapists to
11 help identify and enroll blind and visually impaired children,
12 as well as their parents, families, and caregivers, in these
13 educational programs.

14 (2) The program is not an entitlement but shall
15 promote early development with a special emphasis on vision
16 skills to minimize developmental delays. The education shall
17 lay the groundwork for future learning by helping children
18 progress through normal developmental stages; shall teach
19 children to discover and make the best use of their skills for
20 future success in school; and shall seek to ensure that
21 visually impaired and blind children enter school as ready to
22 learn as their sighted classmates. The program shall seek to
23 link these children, as well as their parents, families, and
24 caregivers, to other available services, training, education,
25 and employment programs that could assist these families in
26 the future. The division shall develop a formula for
27 eligibility based on financial means and may create a
28 means-based matrix to set a copayment fee for families with
29 sufficient financial means.

30 (3) The division shall establish outcomes for this
31 program, which shall include, but not be limited to, outcomes

1 relating to the children's age-appropriate developmental
2 stages; knowledge of assistive technology; proficiency at
3 daily living; ability to participate in preschool and,
4 subsequently, school; ability to participate in the community;
5 and ability to develop literacy. The division shall develop
6 criteria to be used in identifying and contracting with
7 community-based provider organizations. The division shall
8 require any community-based provider organization delivering
9 services under this program to develop performance measures
10 related to those services and report to the division on the
11 progress in achieving those measures.

12 Section 3. The Office of Program Policy Analysis and
13 Government Accountability shall conduct a review of, and
14 prepare a report concerning, the Blind Babies Program. The
15 report must be submitted by January 1, 2002, to the Governor,
16 the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of
17 Representatives. The review must be comprehensive and, at a
18 minimum, must specifically determine:

19 (1) The program's progress towards achieving its
20 established outcomes.

21 (2) The circumstances contributing to the program's
22 capacity to achieve, not achieve, or exceed its established
23 outcomes.

24 (3) Whether it is sound public policy to continue
25 funding the program, and the consequences of discontinuing the
26 program.

27 Section 4. There is hereby appropriated from the
28 General Revenue Fund to the Division of Blind Services of the
29 Department of Labor and Employment Security the sum of \$1
30 million annually to fund the Blind Babies Program.

31 Section 5. This act shall take effect July 1, 2000.

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HOUSE SUMMARY

Creates the Blind Babies Program within the Division of Blind Services of the Department of Labor and Employment Security, to provide early intervention education for blind or visually impaired children under age 6, and their families and caregivers. Prescribes program emphasis. Requires the division to develop an eligibility formula, program outcomes, and criteria for contracting with community-based provider organizations for delivery of services. Authorizes a copayment fee for families with sufficient means. Requires providers to develop performance measures and report achievement to the division. Requires the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Governmental Accountability to renew the program and report to the Governor and Legislature by January 1, 2002. Provides an annual appropriation.