

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; requiring the
17 Division of Blind Services to submit
18 recommendations to the Legislature on a method
19 of privatizing the business enterprise program
20 established under s. 413.051, F.S.; providing
21 an effective date.

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

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25 Section 1. The Legislature finds that all children
26 must have a healthy start in life, including babies who are
27 visually impaired or blind. Early intervention services at the
28 youngest age greatly improve a child's chances for success and
29 self-sufficiency in life and reduce the severity of long-term
30 disabilities. It is critical to teach infants and toddlers who
31 are born or become blind or visually impaired, as well as to

1 teach the parents, families, and caregivers of such children,
2 the skills to assist them, so that these children do not miss
3 critical developmental stages that are normally dependent on
4 vision. This early intervention is also essential to ensure
5 that these children can access and benefit from other services
6 that assist, educate, train, and employ young people.

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

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

1 means-based matrix to set a copayment fee for families with
2 sufficient financial means.

3 (3) The division shall establish outcomes for this
4 program, which shall include, but not be limited to, outcomes
5 relating to the children's age-appropriate developmental
6 stages; knowledge of assistive technology; proficiency at
7 daily living; ability to participate in preschool and,
8 subsequently, school; ability to participate in the community;
9 and ability to develop literacy. The division shall develop
10 criteria to be used in identifying and contracting with
11 community-based provider organizations. The division shall
12 require any community-based provider organization delivering
13 services under this program to develop performance measures
14 related to those services and report to the division on the
15 progress in achieving those measures.

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

23 (1) The program's progress towards achieving its
24 established outcomes.

25 (2) The circumstances contributing to the program's
26 capacity to achieve, not achieve, or exceed its established
27 outcomes.

28 (3) Whether it is sound public policy to continue
29 funding the program, and the consequences of discontinuing the
30 program.

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1 Section 4. The Division of Blind Services of the
2 Department of Labor and Employment Security shall recommend to
3 the Legislature a method to privatize the business enterprise
4 program established under s. 413.051 by creating a
5 not-for-profit entity. The entity shall conform to
6 requirements of the federal Randolph Sheppard Act and shall be
7 composed of blind licensees with expertise in operating
8 business enterprises. The division shall submit its
9 recommendations to the Governor, the President of the Senate,
10 and the Speaker of the House of Representatives, as well as to
11 the appropriate substantive committees of the Legislature, by
12 January 1, 2001.

13 Section 5. There is hereby appropriated from the
14 General Revenue Fund to the Division of Blind Services of the
15 Department of Labor and Employment Security the sum of \$1
16 million annually to fund the Blind Babies Program.

17 Section 6. This act shall take effect July 1, 2000.
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