

By Senator Webster

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A bill to be entitled
An act relating to children; providing for
early-intervention for certain children who are
born visually impaired or blind; requiring a
report; providing an appropriation; providing
an effective date.

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

Section 1. The Legislature finds that all newborns must have a healthy start in life, including babies who are born visually impaired or blind. Early-intervention services at the youngest age greatly improve a child's chances for success in life and reduce the severity of long-term disabilities resulting from babies not developing normally. It is critical to teach parents and caregivers of newborns who are born blind or with visual impairment the skills to assist them so they do not miss critical developmental stages that are normally dependent on vision.

Section 2. (1) The Blind Babies Program is created within the Division of Blind Services of the Department of Labor and Employment Security to provide community-based early-intervention education to parents and caregivers of visually impaired or blind babies, from birth through 5 years of age, through community-based provider organizations.

(2) The program is not an entitlement and must be made available on a means basis only. The division shall develop a formula for eligibility based on financial means and may create a means-based matrix to set a co-payment fee for families having sufficient financial means.

1 Section 3. The Office of Program, Policy Analysis, and
2 Government Accountability shall conduct a review of, and
3 prepare a report concerning the Blind Babies Program. The
4 report must be submitted by January 1, 2002, to the Governor,
5 the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of
6 Representatives. The review must be comprehensive but, at a
7 minimum, must specifically determine:

8 (1) The program's progress towards achieving its
9 established outcomes.

10 (2) The circumstances contributing to the program's
11 capacity to achieve, not achieve, or exceed its established
12 outcomes.

13 (3) Whether it will be sound public policy to continue
14 funding the program and the consequences of discontinuing the
15 program.

16 Section 4. The sum of \$1 million is annually
17 appropriated from the General Revenue Fund to the Division of
18 Blind Services of the Department of Labor and Employment
19 Security to fund the Blind Babies Program.

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

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23 SENATE SUMMARY

24 Creates an early-intervention program for certain
25 visually impaired or blind children. Requires a report.
26 Provides an annual appropriation.