

1 A bill to be entitled
2 An act relating to children; providing
3 legislative findings; creating a Blind Babies
4 Program; providing for early-intervention
5 education for certain children who are blind or
6 visually impaired and for their parents,
7 families, and caregivers; prescribing program
8 emphasis; requiring development of program
9 outcomes, criteria, and performance measures;
10 requiring reports; providing an appropriation;
11 providing an effective date.

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

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15 Section 1. The Legislature finds that all children
16 must have a healthy start in life, including babies who are
17 visually impaired or blind. Early-intervention services at the
18 youngest age greatly improve a child's chances for success and
19 self-sufficiency in life and reduce the severity of long-term
20 disabilities resulting from babies not developing normally. It
21 is critical to teach infants and toddlers who are born or
22 become blind or visually impaired, and to teach the parents,
23 families, and caregivers of such children, the skills to
24 assist them so these children do not miss critical
25 developmental stages that are normally dependent on vision.
26 This early intervention is also essential to ensure that these
27 children can access and benefit from other services that
28 assist, educate, train, and employ young people.

29 Section 2. (1) The Blind Babies Program is created
30 within the Division of Blind Services of the Department of
31 Labor and Employment Security to provide community-based

1 early-intervention education to children from birth through 5
2 years of age who are blind or visually impaired, and to their
3 parents, families, and caregivers, through community-based
4 provider organizations. The division shall enlist parents,
5 ophthalmologists, pediatricians, schools, Infant and Toddlers
6 Early Intervention Programs, and therapists to help identify
7 and enroll blind and visually impaired children, as well as
8 their parents, families, and caregivers, in these educational
9 programs.

10 (2) The program is not an entitlement but shall
11 promote early development with a special emphasis on vision
12 skills to minimize developmental delays. The education shall
13 lay the groundwork for future learning by helping a child
14 progress through normal developmental stages. It shall teach
15 children to discover and make the best use of their skills for
16 future success in school. It shall seek to ensure that
17 visually impaired and blind children enter school as ready to
18 learn as their sighted classmates. The program shall seek to
19 link these children, and their parents, families, and
20 caregivers, to other available services, training, education,
21 and employment programs that could assist these families in
22 the future. This linkage may include referrals to the school
23 districts and the Infants and Toddlers Early Intervention
24 Program for assessments to identify any additional services
25 needed which are not provided by the Blind Babies Program. The
26 division shall develop a formula for eligibility based on
27 financial means and may create a means-based matrix to set a
28 copayment fee for families having sufficient financial means.

29 (3) The division shall establish outcomes for this
30 program, which shall include, but are not limited to, outcomes
31 relating to the children's age-appropriate developmental

1 stages; knowledge of assistive technology; proficiency at
2 daily living; ability to participate in pre-school and school;
3 participation in their communities; and ability to be
4 literate. The division shall develop criteria to be used in
5 identifying and contracting with community-based provider
6 organizations. All services offered through the Blind Babies
7 Program shall be provided by community-based provider
8 organizations. The division shall require any community-based
9 provider organization delivering services under this program
10 to develop performance measures related to those services and
11 report to the division on the progress in achieving those
12 measures.

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

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

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

25 (3) Whether it will be sound public policy to continue
26 funding the program and the consequences of discontinuing the
27 program.

28 Section 4. In addition to the sum of \$530,000
29 appropriated from the General Revenue Fund in the General
30 Appropriations Act for the 2000-2001 fiscal year for the Blind
31 Babies Program, the sum of \$470,000 is appropriated from the

1 General Revenue Fund to the Division of Blind Services of the
2 Department of Labor and Employment Security to fund the Blind
3 Babies Program during the 2000-2001 fiscal year. Of the total
4 amount appropriated for the program in this act and in the
5 General Appropriations Act for the 2000-2001 fiscal year, 90
6 percent of the funds must be provided for direct consumer
7 services. Funds shall be distributed based on enrollment,
8 which is contingent upon the Division of Blind Services
9 determining eligibility.

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