

SENATE STAFF ANALYSIS AND ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

BILL: CS/SB 1684

SPONSOR: Children and Families Committee and Senator Campbell

SUBJECT: Family Issues/Fatherhood/Parenthood

DATE: March 11, 2002 REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Dowds	Whiddon	CF	Favorable/CS
2.			JU	
3.			AHS	
4.			AP	
5.				
6.				

I. Summary:

CS/SB1684 creates s. 39.320, F.S., to establish the Commission on Marriage and Family Support Initiatives within the Department of Children and Families. The responsibilities of the commission include developing comprehensive statewide strategies to facilitate the connection of responsible fathers with their families and children, to increase the availability of and access to parenting and relationship skills education and training and to encourage and support the formation and maintenance of two-parent families. The commission is to consist of 18 members, the appointments for which are set forth in the bill. The bill requires that the commission coordinate with community-based organizations and submit an annual report. Sections 383.0112, 383.0113 and 383.0114, F.S., which relate to the Commission of Responsible Fatherhood, are repealed and the funding allocated for this commission is provided for the newly established Commission on Marriage and Family Support Initiatives.

This bill creates section 39.320, of the Florida Statutes. The bill repeals sections 383.0112, 383.0113, and 383.0114, of the Florida Statutes.

II. Present Situation:

Florida Commission on Responsible Fatherhood

In 1996, the Legislature established the Commission on Responsible Fatherhood (ch. 96-175, L.O.F.) for the purpose of raising awareness of the problems children face when responsible fathers are absent, identifying obstacles that prevent fathers from being involved in the lives of their children and identifying strategies that would encourage responsible fatherhood. Section 383.0112, F.S., charged the commission with compiling information on the impact of absent fathers, identifying barriers to responsible fatherhood and recommendations to eliminate

the barriers, identifying strategies and uses of state and community resources that encourage responsible fatherhood, developing strategies to assist children and families when the father is absent and working with the Healthy Start Coalitions to increase participation of responsible fathers in families. The membership of the commission has included legislators, a judge, appointments by the Governor, and representatives from a number of organizations affiliated with children, families and fathers issues (s. 383.0113, F.S.).

Since 1996, Florida has funded 27 programs through the commission serving fathers in 35 counties. The programs supported by the commission have fallen into primarily two categories: community-based programs that build and strengthen the relationship between fathers and their children and families and programs to assist non-custodial parents obtain employment, pay child support and become more knowledgeable and involved fathers. The commission has been funded with dollars from the Department of Children and Families, Department of Health and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) block grant funds.

Combining Fatherhood and Family Issues

The creation of Florida's Commission on Responsible Fatherhood and initiation of this state's attention to improving the involvement of fathers in the lives of children and families was based on the realization that the number of children growing up without a father was drastically increasing (by 56 percent over the past two decades) and the role of the father in the child's well-being was critical, both financially and in positive outcomes for the children. Since the commission's inception, research and experience have indicated that achieving the goal of ensuring children have responsible fathers requires attention not only to the father but also to preserving and strengthening families, both mothers and fathers.

Fathers who are not involved in their children's lives have historically included those fathers who can pay support but do not, those fathers who would pay support but cannot financially afford to do so and those fathers who provide informal support. Initiatives to build responsible fathers have, as a result, focused on the issues facing fathers that result in their inability or unwillingness to support their children, both financially and emotionally. More recently, fragile families have emerged as an important group to target to strengthen responsible fatherhood and families. These are low-income, unmarried parents and their children, who, if able to develop a long-term relationship or even marriage, have a good chance of preserving both parents' involvement in the lives of their children, thus preventing children growing up without their fathers.

Research is showing that that low-income mothers and fathers have high expectations about their relationship and their roles as parents. More specifically, 80 percent of low-income, never married parents were romantically involved at the birth of their child and more than half were living together. Financial or in-kind support was provided to the mother during the pregnancy by more than 90 percent of the fathers. Almost 70 percent of the fathers visited their newborn in the hospital and more than 80 percent of these fathers expressed their intent to continue providing support. (*Connecting Low-Income Fathers and Families: A Guide to Practical Policies*, National Conference of State Legislatures, 2000)

The new challenge is how to capitalize on these expectations for a committed relationship and dual parenting and support both parents' efforts to create a strong family structure for their children. Strategies that focus on both parents and include father-specific services are being promoted as avenues to prevent these fragile families from disengaging from their responsibilities as a result of the pressures of parenting and financial circumstances. (*Connecting Low-Income Fathers and Families: A Guide to Practical Policies*, National Conference of State Legislatures, 2000)

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

CS/SB 1684 creates s. 39.320, F.S., to establish the Commission on Marriage and Family Support Initiatives within the Department of Children and Families. The responsibilities of the commission include developing comprehensive statewide strategies to facilitate the connection of responsible fathers with their families and children, to increase the availability of and access to parenting and relationship skills education and training and to encourage and support the formation and maintenance of two-parent families. The commission is to consist of 18 members, the appointments for which are set forth in the bill. The bill requires that the commission coordinate with community-based organizations and submit an annual report. Sections 383.0112, 383.0113, and 383.0114, F.S., which relate to the Commission of Responsible Fatherhood, are repealed and the funding allocated for this commission is provided for the newly established Commission on Marriage and Family Support Initiatives.

The focus of the current Commission on Responsible Fatherhood is broadened by this bill to incorporate supporting families, both father and mother, and the family structure and is assigned to the newly created Commission on Marriage and Family Support Initiatives.

Section 39.320, F.S., is created and sets forth the parameters for the Commission on Marriage and Family Support Initiatives. Legislative findings are expressed which include that families need support and guidance from community systems, that families are facing many problems and that public policy should not force people to marry or diminish benefits to single mothers. The bill recognizes that ending the dependence of low-income parents and encouraging the formation and maintenance of two-parent families are identified purposes of the federal welfare reform initiative. The legislative intent of the bill is to build on the accomplishments of the Commission on Responsible Fatherhood and to increase public awareness of the problems of families; to develop public policy related to parenting, marriage and the effects of societal problems on families; and to provide supports for children and encourage marriage and family life.

The bill provides that the Commission on Marriage and Family Support Initiatives is to consist of 18 members, with the Governor, the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President of the Senate each appointing six members. Representation from businesses, workforce development, education, state and local governments, the judicial system, health care, substance abuse, domestic violence centers, child development, community organizations and faith-based organizations must be included on the commission. A minimum of 50 percent of the members must represent the private sector. Members are to be appointed for 2-year terms. However, the initial appointments must be staggered and include members appointed for 1-year, 2-year and 3-year terms. While the members are to elect the chair of the commission, initially, the chair of the Commission on Responsible Fatherhood is to serve as chair of the Commission on Marriage

and Family Support Initiatives for a 1-year period. Members are not entitled to compensation, but their travel expenses shall be reimbursed.

CS/SB 1684 charges the Commission on Marriage and Family Support Initiatives with the following responsibilities:

- Developing a report that provides comprehensive statewide strategies to promote and nurture responsible parenting and facilitate the connection of responsible fathers with their families and children;
- Developing recommendations for increasing the availability of parenting and relationship skills education and training and for supporting the formation of two-parent families and family structures that are best for children;
- Providing a plan for delivery of services to assist families to learn communication and conflict resolution both before and during marriage and to appropriately work through problems in the event of a divorce;
- Producing a manual of practices that are successful at promoting marriage and families;
- Developing a community awareness campaign promoting community collaboration and local programs that promote marriage in families; and
- Serving as a clearinghouse for research on societal problems facing families and innovative services.

The commission is required to coordinate with community-based organizations. An annual report on the progress made in accomplishing the commission's designated activities is to be submitted by December 31st of each year to the Governor, the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. The commission is repealed on June 30, 2007 unless reenacted by the Legislature.

The bill creates the commission in the Department of Children and Families but retains the current arrangement of housing the commission with the Ounce of Prevention. The funding allocated to the Commission on Responsible Fatherhood is designated for the operation of the Commission on Marriage and Family Support Initiative, and the community-based programs established by the Commission on Responsible Fatherhood are to be continued and supported with this funding.

The Commission on Responsible Fatherhood, as set forth in ss. 383.0112, 383.0113, and 383.0114, F.S., ceases to exist with the repeal of these sections by this bill.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

V. Economic Impact and Fiscal Note:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

None.

C. Government Sector Impact:

The Department of Children and Families reports that this bill would be revenue neutral since the funding would be transferred from the Commission on Responsible Fatherhood to the Commission on Marriage and Family Support Initiatives.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

The description of the report to be prepared by the commission on statewide strategies to promote responsible parents erroneously uses the word “recommendation” instead of “reconnection” for “including connection and reconnection of responsible parents.”

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Amendments:

None.