

By Representative Lynn

1 A bill to be entitled
 2 An act relating to children and families;
 3 creating s. 39.320, F.S.; providing legislative
 4 findings and intent; creating the Commission on
 5 Florida Families within the Department of
 6 Children and Family Services; providing
 7 purposes and responsibilities; providing for
 8 coordination with other organizations and
 9 entities; authorizing appointment of advisory
 10 committees; providing for funding of the
 11 commission; repealing ss. 383.0112, 383.0113,
 12 and 383.0114, F.S., relating to the Commission
 13 on Responsible Fatherhood and community-based
 14 programs to encourage responsible fatherhood;
 15 providing an effective date.

16
 17 Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

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 19 Section 1. Section 39.320, Florida Statutes, is
 20 created to read:

21 39.320 Commission on Florida Families.--

22 (1) LEGISLATIVE FINDINGS AND INTENT.--

23 (a) The Legislature finds that single mothers deserve
 24 respect and support in grappling with circumstances far harder
 25 than the majority of individuals can possibly imagine, but it
 26 should not be forgotten that fathers have a unique and
 27 irreplaceable role in the lives of children, that children
 28 need their fathers, and that when fathers are absent, children
 29 suffer.

30 (b) The Legislature finds that children raised in
 31 two-parent households are healthier, have greater educational

1 success, and are less likely to need public assistance or be
2 involved in crimes or drugs and that the circumstance most
3 favorable to sustaining two-parent families is the institution
4 of marriage.

5 (c) The Legislature finds that academic research has
6 shown that at the time of the birth of a child to low-income,
7 unmarried parents, the majority of the parents were
8 romantically involved and committed to raising their child and
9 the majority of those parents believed that marriage is
10 beneficial to children.

11 (d) The Legislature finds that, while the majority of
12 low-income, unmarried parents value marriage and want to
13 marry, few actually do marry because of complex family
14 situations and barriers, such as lack of education and
15 employment and the existence of additional children from other
16 relationships.

17 (e) The Legislature also finds that while some
18 relationships between mothers and fathers are broken and
19 beyond repair, others can be nurtured and salvaged with the
20 provision of appropriate supports to fathers as well as
21 mothers. These supports may include opportunities to obtain or
22 increase educational levels and employment skills and easy
23 affordable access to relationship skills education. For some
24 unwed parents, it will be possible and desirable to help them
25 move towards marriage; for others who are in new
26 relationships, the optimum goal may be to help them co-parent,
27 spend time with their child, and pay child support regularly.

28 (f) The Legislature finds that assisting states to end
29 dependence of low-income parents by promoting job preparation,
30 work, and marriage and assisting states to encourage the
31 formation and maintenance of two-parent families are the two

1 of four stated purposes of federal welfare reform enacted in
2 1996 that have been largely neglected by states and that
3 states are now urging Congress to designate 10 percent of all
4 welfare funds for relationship education and skills
5 development, responsible fatherhood programs, and community
6 support as it seeks to reauthorize the Temporary Assistance
7 for Needy Families Act in 2002.

8 (g) The Legislature further finds that state public
9 policy should not force people to get married, should not
10 withdraw benefits to single mothers merely because they are
11 not married, and should not keep people in abusive
12 relationships. Rather, it should be the policy of this state
13 to define marriage as the ideal, particularly in situations
14 where there are children; to help those individuals who choose
15 marriage obtain access to what they need to sustain a healthy
16 marriage; and to be compassionate towards other family
17 situations.

18 (h) It is therefore the intent of the Legislature to
19 build on the accomplishments of the Commission on Responsible
20 Fatherhood, which is now recognized as the national model of a
21 comprehensive statewide strategy to address fatherhood issues;
22 to provide the direction necessary to increase public
23 awareness of the problems of failing marriages, not only for
24 individuals but also for communities and the larger society;
25 and to continue to develop sound public policy related to
26 fathers, parenting, marriage, and the effects of poverty on
27 children and their families through the work of the Commission
28 on Florida Families. The Legislature further intends that, to
29 the extent practicable, the laws of this state should
30 encourage, promote, and value strong, safe, long-term
31 marriages.

1 (2) ESTABLISHMENT OF COMMISSION.--There is created
2 within the Department of Children and Family Services the
3 Commission on Florida Families. The commission shall consist
4 of 18 members, with 6 each appointed by the Governor, the
5 President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of
6 Representatives. At least 50 percent of the commission members
7 must be representatives from the private sector. The
8 commission members shall include representatives of business,
9 workforce development, education, state government, local
10 government, mental health, child development, and community
11 and faith-based organizations.

12 (3) PURPOSES AND RESPONSIBILITIES.--The purposes of
13 the commission are to develop comprehensive statewide
14 strategies to facilitate the connection or reconnection of
15 responsible fathers with their families and children, to
16 increase the availability of and access to parenting and
17 relationship skills education and training, and to encourage
18 and support the formation and maintenance of two-parent
19 families. In order to carry out these purposes, and subject to
20 the availability of funds, the commission is directed to:

21 (a) Develop a plan for statewide implementation of s.
22 232.246(1)(i), relating to marriage and relationship
23 skill-based education, through programs modeled after the
24 PEERS, PAIRS, Connections, or Loving Well programs.

25 (b) Develop a statewide plan for delivering services
26 and supports to couples to help them learn communication and
27 conflict resolution skills prior to marriage, enable couples
28 to refresh those skills periodically during marriage and, if
29 the marriage fails, provide divorce education and mediation
30 techniques that teach parents how to work through their
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1 problems and how to minimize the impact of the divorce on
2 their children.

3 (c) Develop, in conjunction with the Department of
4 Revenue, recommendations to achieve balance between the
5 traditional mission of child support enforcement agencies as
6 welfare cost-recovery programs and a new expanded mission of
7 helping families become self-supporting, while at the same
8 time improving agency performance, meeting federal performance
9 measures, and providing low-income fathers with the
10 opportunity to demonstrate their capacity to provide financial
11 support to their children.

12 (d) Serve as a clearinghouse for collecting and
13 disseminating information related to research findings on
14 poverty and its effect on families, and innovative approaches
15 to the delivery of services necessary for the formation and
16 maintenance of two-parent families.

17 (e) Make recommendations to the Legislature annually
18 with respect to policy development in these areas.

19 (4) COORDINATION.--The commission shall coordinate its
20 work with community-based organizations, including those that
21 are faith-based, with schools, courts, adult and juvenile
22 criminal justice systems, and agencies providing social
23 welfare, welfare transition, and child support services, and
24 with any appropriate research and policy development centers,
25 including, but not limited to, those within universities that
26 focus on issues related to fatherhood, low-income families,
27 marriages, and children, poverty, parenting, and relationship
28 skills.

29 (5) ADVISORY COMMITTEES.--The commission may appoint
30 advisory committees that the commission considers appropriate,
31 which may include members from outside the commission, to

1 study special problems or issues and advise the commission on
2 those subjects. Any existing advisory board, commission, or
3 council may seek to become an official advisory committee to
4 the commission by submitting to the commission a resolution
5 requesting affiliation and having the request approved by the
6 commission. The commission shall establish the operating
7 procedures of the committees.

8 (6) FUNDING.--The operation of the Commission on
9 Florida Families shall be funded from general revenue funds
10 currently allocated to the Commission on Responsible
11 Fatherhood. The Commission on Florida Families may seek and
12 accept grants, funds, or gifts from any source, public or
13 private, federal, state, or local, to supplement its operation
14 and defray the expenses incurred in the operation and
15 implementation of this section.

16 Section 2. Sections 383.0112, 383.0113, and 383.0114,
17 Florida Statutes, are repealed.

18 Section 3. This act shall take effect July 1, 2002.

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21 HOUSE SUMMARY

22
23 Creates the Commission on Florida Families within the
24 Department of Children and Family Services. Provides
25 purposes and responsibilities, including, subject to
26 availability of funds, development of statewide plans
27 concerning delivery of services and supports to couples
28 and parents, collection and dissemination of information
29 relating to poverty and its effect on families, and
30 making annual recommendations to the Legislature.
31 Provides for coordination with other organizations and
entities. Authorizes appointment of advisory committees.
Provides for funding of the commission from moneys
currently allocated to the Commission on Responsible
Fatherhood and authorizes other funding through grants
and gifts. Abolishes the Commission on Responsible
Fatherhood and eliminates current community-based
programs for encouraging responsible fatherhood.