

II. Present Situation:

Children's Advocacy Centers (CAC) are primarily designed and governed at the local level to provide support to the child protective investigations process. These centers work to coordinate the activities of the several agencies involved in the child abuse investigation to reduce the number of times the child must be interviewed, thereby reducing trauma to the child, to facilitate joint investigations, and to provide for prompt access to mental health and other appropriate services.

While the services offered by child advocacy centers vary based upon their funding and needs of the community, each center offers some combination of the following services:

- a neutral, child-friendly setting where all the agencies can interview and examine the child;
- medical evaluations of the child;
- coordination of multi-discipline team meeting of all of the agencies involved in a case;
- on-site victim advocacy; and
- mental health services.

The CACs have local governing boards to address organizational issues such as fiscal policies and public relations and are composed of volunteers from the community. Although they are locally governed, CACs operate under the auspices of the National Children's Alliance (NCA). The alliance is a not-for-profit organization that provides training, technical assistance, and networking opportunities to CACs operating nationwide. The NCA establishes standards for CAC accreditation and offers full membership and non-competitive grant funding to those CACs meeting 10 standards. Centers that do not meet all of the standards for full membership are designated as associate members and are eligible to apply for competitive grants. Twelve of the 20 CACs in Florida are full members of the NCA.

The Florida Network of Children's Advocacy Centers, Inc., is a state chapter of the National Children's Alliance. All 20 of Florida's children advocacy centers participate in this network. Membership is voluntary and the organization provides guidance and technical assistance to the CACs. The network has no paid staff but there is a board of directors that organizes activities.

Minimum standards for membership in the Florida Network are established in ch. 39.3035, F.S., and are similar to those for membership in the National Children's Alliance. These criteria require that a center:

- be a private, not-for-profit incorporated agency or governmental entity;
- be a Child Protection Team (CPT) or have a written agreement that incorporates the participation and service of the CPT;
- have a neutral, child-focused facility;
- have staff that is supervised and approved by a local board of directors or governmental agency;
- have a multi-disciplinary case review team that minimally consists of representation from the State Attorney's office, Department of Children and Family Services, CPT, mental health services, law enforcement, and the child advocacy center staff;
- track the cases seen through the child advocacy center with minimum requirements on the data to be collected identified;

- provide referrals for medical exams and mental health services;
- provide training in the community; and
- have interagency agreements for the multidisciplinary approach to handling child sexual abuse and serious child abuse.

Child advocacy centers in Florida are required to meet these standards and be full members of the Florida Network of Children’s Advocacy Centers in order to be eligible to receive state funds appropriated by the Legislature [s. 39.3035(3), F.S.]

Funding for CACs is received from a variety of sources. These sources include local donations, grants from local governments, private foundations and contracts with state agencies such as the Department of Children and Families, Department of Juvenile Justice and the Department of Health. Since FY 1999-00, the Legislature has appropriated funds ranging from \$400,000 to \$750,000 annually for five of the children’s advocacy centers. Funds were appropriated by the Legislature for three CACs for FY 02-03 to be used for operations, salaries and benefits, and to pay construction debt, funding for the fourth CAC was vetoed by the Governor.

In FY 2001-02, the budgets of the 20 advocacy centers ranged from \$34,857 to over \$1.4 million, and the total budget for all 20 was \$6,308,527. The funding is primarily used for salaries and benefits, with staffing patterns ranging from one-half of a full time position to 25 positions. Specific funding sources vary across centers as well as the degree to which these centers rely on a single funding source.

The Joint Legislative Auditing Committee directed the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability to review CACs. Their report, released in August 2002, reflects that local stakeholders are highly supportive of the centers and indicates that the centers improve the coordination of child abuse investigations and their outcomes. The child welfare literature supports the benefits of CACs, particularly in reducing trauma experienced by the child during investigations.

However, Children’s Advocacy Centers are primarily responsible to their boards and do not have a comprehensive accountability system which reports their inputs, outputs, and outcomes. Centers that are full members and accredited by the NCA must maintain client information in a case tracking system and report caseloads, client demographics, and case disposition biannually. The eight Florida associate members do not have the same reporting requirements. Currently neither the state nor the NCA requires the CACs to report accountability data such as cost per case or whether services are provided in a timely manner.

Prevalence of Specified Crimes Against Minors

The prevalence of the crimes against children specified in this bill is unclear. The Office of the State Courts Administrator estimates the following prevalence for felonies listed in SB 1058:

Violation	Number of Charges
s. 784.085, F.S., Battery of a child	0
ch. 787, F.S., Kidnapping, false imprisonment	1,108
ch. 794, F.S., Sexual battery	1,190
s. 796.03, F.S., Procuring person under age 18 for prostitution	11

s. 800.04, F.S., Lewd or lascivious offenses	2,403
ch. 827, F.S., Abuse of Children	3,614
s. 847.0145, F.S., Buying or selling of minors	0
s. 985.4045, F.S., Sexual misconduct of Juvenile Justice employees	2
Total	8,328

The Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) collects information on crime. However, the definitions used for reporting are compatible with other law enforcement systems and are not inclusive of all crimes against children that are specified by this legislation. The January - December 2001 Crime in Florida report indicates that in the category of domestic violence, over 9,000 victims of crimes such as manslaughter, homicide, forcible sex offenses or assault were children.

Current Court Costs

Persons who are convicted of crimes against minors specified by this bill currently may incur fines ranging from \$15,000 to \$500 depending upon the type of conviction. Counties may also adopt ordinances to impose additional fines of \$50 for felony offenses or \$20 for misdemeanor offenses. The county fines are not contingent on conviction.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

This bill proposes that additional court costs of \$101 be imposed in cases of certain crimes against children. These crimes include battery of a child, kidnapping or false imprisonment, sexual battery, procuring persons under the age of 18 years for prostitution, lewd or lascivious offenses on or in the presence of persons less than 16 years of age, abuse of children, buying or selling of minors, and sexual misconduct of Juvenile Justice employees. The additional court cost would be imposed against each offender pleading guilty or nolo contendere to, or is found guilty of, regardless of adjudication, any of the specified offenses against a minor.

The bill also directs the Clerk of the Court to transfer \$100 from each court cost collected to the State Treasury for deposit into the Child Advocacy Trust Fund. The funds are to be disbursed to the Florida Network of Children’s Advocacy Centers, Inc., for the purpose of funding child advocacy centers that are members of the network. One dollar from each cost collected is to be retained by the Clerk of the Court as a service charge.

CS/SB 1056 provides the opportunity for Children’s Advocacy Centers to replace and possibly, expand upon funding that may not be continued next year. The continued support for special projects is unknown at this time. Some of the centers under the current funding configuration report having problems funding the services provided by the center. Providing the funding to the network for distribution to the children’s advocacy centers will allow the network to develop an allocation methodology that is sensitive to community needs.

Court costs will be assessed and collected statewide but only disbursed to CACs. Based upon the estimated prevalence of crimes against children in 2001 using the FDLE report, the fees collected may exceed \$900,000 annually. Another estimate may be derived using the numbers obtained from the court data system, which is \$832,800 annually.

While there appear to be many benefits to Children's Advocacy Centers, it is not always clear how local centers supplement the child protective investigative workload, if some of the duties overlap, or if a distinctly different population is served. Given the current variability in service arrays and funding streams across the individual centers, the specific needs and outcomes this funding will be used to support is unclear. Requiring annual reports of expenditures, sources of revenue, and outputs such as the number of clients served, client demographic information, and number and types of services provided to the Legislature will help ensure the non-duplication of funding and improve the consistency of information gathered across the centers.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

This trust fund is restricted to the disbursement of funds to the Florida Network of Children's Advocacy Centers, Inc.

V. Economic Impact and Fiscal Note:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

The funds collected and placed in the Child Advocacy Trust Fund would benefit local child advocacy centers.

C. Government Sector Impact:

The clerk of the court would collect a \$1 service charge for collecting and disbursing court costs assessed and deposited in the Child Advocacy Trust Fund.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

CS/SB 1056 is linked to CS/SB 1048, a trust fund bill.

VIII. Amendments:

None.

This Senate staff analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's sponsor or the Florida Senate.
