

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STAFF ANALYSIS

BILL #: HB 1515 Children and Families

SPONSOR(S): Reagan

TIED BILLS: IDEN./SIM. BILLS:

REFERENCE	ACTION	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR
1) Children's Services (Sub)	6 Y, 0 N	Preston	Liem
2) Future of Florida's Families			
3) Appropriations			
4)			
5)			

SUMMARY ANALYSIS

House Bill 1515 creates the Commission on Marriage and Family Support Initiatives within the Department of Children and Family Services (DCF). The duties of the commission include developing comprehensive statewide strategies to facilitate the connection or reconnection of responsible fathers and mothers with their families and children, increasing the availability of and access to parenting and relationship skills education and training, and encouraging and supporting 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, prepare a number of reports that are to be submitted to the Governor and the Legislature, and submit an annual report. The bill repeals §§ 383.0112, 383.0113, and 383.0114, Florida Statutes, relating to the Commission on Responsible Fatherhood.

The bill provides that the commission be funded from monies currently appropriated to the DCF and Department of Health (DOH) for the Commission on Responsible Fatherhood. The Commission on Responsible Fatherhood is currently allocated \$500,000 in funding. The bill also authorizes the commission to seek other funding through grants and gifts.

This document does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill sponsor or House of Representatives.

STORAGE NAME: h1515a.fff.doc

DATE: April 2, 2003

FULL ANALYSIS

I. SUBSTANTIVE ANALYSIS

A. DOES THE BILL:

- | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|---|
| 1. Reduce government? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> | N/A <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Lower taxes? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> | N/A <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Expand individual freedom? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> | N/A <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Increase personal responsibility? | Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> | N/A <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. Empower families? | Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> | N/A <input type="checkbox"/> |

For any principle that received a “no” above, please explain:

B. EFFECT OF PROPOSED CHANGES:

Florida Commission on Responsible Fatherhood

The Florida Commission on Responsible Fatherhood was established by the Legislature in 1996, in §§383.0112, 383.0113, and 383.0114, Florida Statutes.¹ Based on a national model, the commission’s purpose was to develop comprehensive statewide strategies to address fatherhood issues. The commission was mandated to:

- Identify barriers in both the public and private sectors to responsible fatherhood;
- Identify successful strategies that encourage responsible fatherhood and recommend and promote those which should be recognized, expanded, or replicated;
- Identify how existing state and community resources can be used to encourage responsible fatherhood; and
- Identify strategies to meet the needs of children and families when a responsible father is not available for a family.

The commission includes members of the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government, and the public. The commission has been funded with dollars from DCF, DOH, and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) block grant funds. Since 1996, when 33 percent of Florida’s children did not live in the same home as their father, Florida has funded 29 programs serving fathers in over 30 counties. The commission has primarily supported two types of programs:

- Community-based programs that build and strengthen the relationship between fathers and their children; and
- Programs that assist non-custodial parents obtain employment, pay child support, and become more knowledgeable and involved fathers.²

Florida Welfare Reform and Support for Families

The Florida Commission on Responsible Fatherhood is one component of the initiatives the Florida Legislature has established to support families. Florida was one of the first states to use the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, or federal welfare reform, to strengthen families. Welfare reform had several goals, one of which was to encourage the formation

¹ Chapter 96-175 and Chapter 96-402, Laws of Florida

² Commission on Responsible Fatherhood Annual Reports

and maintenance of two-parent families.³ There were no guidelines, incentives, or sanctions to help states reach this goal and few states designed policies to help poor families stay together. Florida's Work and Gain Economic Self-sufficiency (WAGES) Program,⁴ which placed time limits on cash assistance and provided child care, education, and job training, took an important and successful step toward helping low-income families become and remain self-sufficient.

Florida took welfare reform a step further to support families by enacting the Workforce Innovation Act in 2000.⁵ With fewer than 32,000 families across the state still receiving cash assistance, the Legislature consolidated many federal and state job training, employment support, and welfare transition programs, to provide better support for working families and improve workforce development. One purpose of Workforce Florida is to provide training and other support to help families move out of low-wage jobs and establish a more secure future.

Combining Fatherhood and Family Issues

New approaches that integrate efforts to address marriage, family, and fatherhood issues to low-income fathers and mothers as a vulnerable family rather than as opposing parties show promise in helping children grow and develop with two involved parents.

Studies have found men and women of all socioeconomic groups share society's values that define success as having a stable job and belonging to a family. Although many low-income couples are unmarried, research finds they begin in committed relationships and consider marriage and dual parenting as ideal for a child's development. It is in living up to these values that so many fall short. Low-income males especially have difficulty realizing the goal of having a stable job that would enable them to support a family. They are also uncertain about what is expected of them as fathers - particularly because many have entered manhood without the benefit of an involved father.⁶

Research has shown that most poor children under the age of two have a highly involved father, even though only half of them were born to married parents. At the birth of their children, 80 percent of low-income parents were romantically involved, and more than half were cohabitating. More than 90 percent of new fathers provided financial or in-kind support for the mother during pregnancy. Almost 70 percent of fathers visited their newborn in the hospital and more than 80 percent of these fathers expressed their intent to continue providing support. Unfortunately, paternal involvement among poor children drops precipitously as children get older. By the time they reach their teens, only 19 percent of them live with their two natural, married parents, while 59 percent live with their mothers and see their fathers less than weekly.⁷

Supports to strengthen fragile families include opportunities to obtain or increase educational levels and employment skills, and easy and affordable access to relationship skills education. For some unwed parents, it is possible and desirable to help them move towards marriage; for others who are in new relationships, the optimum goal may be to help them co-parent, spend time with their child, and pay child support regularly.

The bill repeals the sections of the Florida Statutes relating to the Commission on Responsible Fatherhood and establishes the Commission on Marriage and Family Support Initiatives within DCF. Further, the bill also provides for the following:

Legislative Findings and Intent

³ PUBLIC LAW 104-193

⁴ Chapter 96-175, Laws of Florida

⁵ Chapter 2000-165, Laws of Florida

⁶ See Ooms, T., Putting Marriage on the Public Agenda, Family Impact Seminar

⁷ See Horn, W., Father Facts 2, The National Fatherhood Initiative

Legislature findings and intent include, but are not limited to the fact that families deserve respect and support and that children need support and guidance from their mothers and their fathers; families face many problems and need support and guidance from community systems to help them thrive; some relationships between mothers and fathers are irreparable; others can be nurtured and salvaged with the provision of appropriate community supports to parents. These supports may include opportunities to obtain:

- Education or employment skills or increase educational levels or employment skills;
- Access to the justice system;
- Support from community agencies to become free from substance abuse and violent relationships; and
- Easy and affordable access to relationship-skills education.

The bill also states that it is the intent of the Legislature 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 support for children and encourage marriage and family life.

Creation of the Commission

The bill creates the Commission on Marriage and Family Support Initiatives (the commission) within DCF. The commission has 18 members, with the Governor, the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President of the Senate each appointing six members. The commission is to consist of members from the public sector and the private sector, including community and faith-based organizations, but at least 50 percent of the commissioners must be from the private sector. Commissioners are to have experience in one or more of the following areas: business; workforce development; education; health care; treatment of substance abuse; child development; and domestic violence prevention.

Commissioners serve 2-year terms, though the initial appointees will serve staggered terms of 3 years, 2 years, and 1 year. Vacancies are filled by the original appointing authority. The chair is elected by the members, with the individual serving as chair of the Commission on Responsible Fatherhood at the time of this act being given first consideration.

Members are not entitled to compensation, but their travel and per diem expenses are to be reimbursed as authorized in s. 112.061, F.S.

Scope of Commission Activities

The bill charges the commission with specified responsibilities which include developing statewide strategies to encourage formation of two-parent families and parenting.

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, 2008, unless reenacted by the Legislature.

The bill creates the commission in DCF 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.

C. SECTION DIRECTORY:

Section 1. Creates the Commission on Marriage and Family Support Initiatives, provides for legislative findings and intent, provides for membership and duties of the commission, requires the commission to coordinate its work with community-based organizations and other community entities, and provides for funding.

Section 2. Repeals, §§383.0112, 383.0113, and 383.0114, Florida Statutes, relating to the Commission on Responsible Fatherhood.

Section 3. Provides for an effective date of July 1, 2003.

II. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE GOVERNMENT:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

See fiscal comments.

B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

None.

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

None.

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

DCF and DOH each provide the Commission on Responsible Fatherhood \$250,000 annually. According to both departments there would be no additional fiscal impact from this bill. The funding for the Commission on Responsible Fatherhood would be redirected to the Commission on Florida Families and the Commission on Responsible Fatherhood would be abolished.

III. COMMENTS

A. CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES:

1. Applicability of Municipality/County Mandates Provision:

This bill does not require counties or municipalities to spend funds or to take an action requiring the expenditure of funds.

2. Other:

None.

B. RULE-MAKING AUTHORITY:

None.

C. DRAFTING ISSUES OR OTHER COMMENTS:

IV. AMENDMENTS/COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE CHANGES

On **April 1, 2003**, the **Subcommittee on Children's Services** adopted a strike everything amendment that made changes to the bill related to the membership of the Commission on Marriage and Family Support Initiatives (the Commission). Specifically, the amendment:

- Ties the Commission to the statutory definition in §20.03(10), Florida Statutes, and provides that the Commission is independent of the Department of Children and Family Services;
- Authorizes the Commission to hire an executive director, a researcher, and an administrative assistant;
- Provides that for the initial appointments, consideration shall be given to current members of the Commission on Responsible Fatherhood; and
- Requires the Commission to hold its first meeting no later than October 1, 2003.