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A bill to be entitled
 An act relating to children and families; providing legislative findings and intent; creating the Commission on Marriage and Family Support Initiatives within the Department of Children and Family Services; providing for membership; providing scope of activity; providing for coordination with other organizations and entities; providing for funding of the commission; repealing ss. 383.0112, 383.0113, and 383.0114, F.S., relating to the Commission on Responsible Fatherhood and community-based programs to encourage responsible fatherhood; providing an effective date.

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

Section 1. The Commission on Marriage and Family Support Initiatives.--

(1) LEGISLATIVE FINDINGS AND INTENT.--

(a) The Legislature finds that families in this state deserve respect and support. Children need support and guidance from both mothers and fathers and families need support and guidance from community systems to help them thrive.

(b) The Legislature finds that there are many problems facing families.

(c) The Legislature finds that Florida is a state rich in diversity, and its population and families come from all over the world, representing many cultures, languages, belief systems, and experiences.

(d) The Legislature also finds that while some relationships between mothers and fathers are broken and beyond



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31 repair, others can be nurtured and salvaged with the provision
32 of appropriate community supports to fathers as well as mothers.
33 For parents, these supports may include opportunities to obtain
34 or increase educational levels and employment skills, access to
35 the justice system, support from community agencies to help them
36 become free of substance abuse and violent relationships, and
37 easy and affordable access to relationship skills education. For
38 some unwed parents, it will be possible and desirable to help
39 them move towards marriage; for others, the optimum goal may be
40 to help them co-parent, spend time with their child, and pay
41 child support regularly.

42 (e) The Legislature finds that assisting states to end
43 dependence of low-income parents by promoting job preparation,
44 work, and marriage and assisting states in encouraging the
45 formation and maintenance of two-parent families are the two of
46 four stated purposes of federal welfare reform enacted in 1996
47 which have been largely neglected by states and that states are
48 now urging Congress to designate 10 percent of all welfare funds
49 for relationship education and skills development, responsible
50 fatherhood programs, and community support as it seeks to
51 reauthorize the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Act in
52 2004.

53 (f) The Legislature further finds that public policy
54 should not operate to force people to get married, should not
55 withdraw or diminish benefits to single mothers merely because
56 they are not married, and should not keep people in abusive
57 relationships.

58 (g) It is therefore the intent of the Legislature to build
59 on the accomplishments of the Commission on Responsible
60 Fatherhood, which has achieved recognition as a national model



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61 of a comprehensive statewide strategy to address fatherhood
62 issues; to increase public awareness of the problems of
63 families, including failing marriages, violence, poverty,
64 substance abuse, and lack of access to community systems and
65 help, and other supports that families need; and to continue to
66 develop sound public policy related to parenting, marriage, and
67 the effects of poverty, violence, and abuse on children and
68 their families through the work of the Commission on Marriage
69 and Family Support Initiatives. The Legislature further intends
70 that, to the extent practicable, the laws of this state should
71 do all that is possible to provide support for children and
72 encourage, promote, and value strong, safe, long-term marriages
73 and family life that includes grandparents, family members,
74 community support, and all that children need to grow up healthy
75 and to thrive.

76 (2) ESTABLISHMENT OF COMMISSION.--

77 (a) There is created within the Department of Children and
78 Family Services the Commission on Marriage and Family Support
79 Initiatives. The commission shall consist of 18 members, with
80 six each appointed by the Governor, the President of the Senate,
81 and the Speaker of the House of Representatives. At least 50
82 percent of the members of the commission must be from the
83 private sector. The commission members shall include
84 representatives of business, workforce development, education,
85 state government, local government, the judicial system, the
86 health care sector, the substance abuse community, domestic
87 violence centers, child development organizations, and community
88 and faith-based organizations. The commission may also designate
89 liaisons to work with it to carry out its mission. Liaisons may



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90 be designated from state and local government agencies and
91 others as the commission sees fit.

92 (b) Initially, the Governor, the President of the Senate,
93 and the Speaker of the House of Representatives shall each
94 appoint as members meeting the qualifications contained in
95 paragraph (a), two members for terms of 3 years each, two
96 members for terms of 2 years each, and two members for terms of
97 1 year each. Thereafter, after receiving recommendations from
98 the commission, the Governor, the President of the Senate, and
99 the Speaker of the House of Representatives shall appoint all
100 members for terms of 2 years. Any vacancy shall be filled by
101 appointment by the original appointing authority for the
102 unexpired portion of the term by a person who possesses the
103 proper qualifications for the vacancy.

104 (c) The members of the commission shall elect one member
105 to serve as chair. For the purpose of maintaining continuity
106 with the work of the Commission on Responsible Fatherhood, the
107 individual serving as the chair of the Commission on Responsible
108 Fatherhood at the time of the effective date of this act shall
109 remain as the chair of the Commission on Marriage and Family
110 Support Initiatives for a term of 1 year, unless subsequently
111 reelected by the members of the commission.

112 (d) Members of the commission are not entitled to
113 compensation for their services as members, but may be
114 reimbursed for travel expenses as provided in s. 112.061,
115 Florida Statutes.

116 (e) The commission shall meet semiannually and more
117 frequently upon call of the chair. The commission may conduct
118 its meetings through teleconferences or other similar means.

119 (3) SCOPE OF ACTIVITY.--The commission shall:



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120 (a) Develop a report that details comprehensive statewide
121 strategies for Florida to promote safe, violence-free,
122 substance-abuse-free, respectful, nurturing, and responsible
123 parenting, including connection or reconnection of responsible
124 parents, both mothers and fathers, with their families and
125 children.

126 (b) Develop a report that makes recommendations on how to
127 increase the availability of and access to parenting and
128 relationship skills education and training, and to encourage and
129 support the formation and maintenance of two-parent families and
130 family structures that are best for the children. This shall
131 include providing a plan for delivering services and supports to
132 couples and families to help them learn communication and
133 conflict-resolution skills prior to marriage, enable couples to
134 refresh those skills periodically during marriage and, if the
135 marriage fails, provide divorce education, safety planning, and
136 mediation techniques that teach parents how to be safe and to
137 work through their problems and how to minimize the impact of
138 the divorce on their children.

139 (c) Produce and promote a promising practices manual or
140 tool that highlights successful efforts at promoting marriage
141 and Florida families and family life.

142 (d) Develop a community awareness campaign to promote
143 community collaboration and coordinated grassroots programs that
144 show how people, advocates, and agencies can work together to
145 promote marriage in Florida families.

146 (e) Serve as a clearinghouse for collecting and
147 disseminating information related to research findings on
148 poverty, violence, and other social forces and their effects on



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149 families and innovative approaches to the delivery of services
150 necessary for the formation and maintenance of strong families.

151 (f) By December 31 of each year, beginning December 31,
152 2003, issue an annual report to the Governor, the President of
153 the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the
154 Chief Justice of the Supreme Court on progress it is making on
155 its responsibilities.

156 (g) This section shall stand repealed on June 30, 2008,
157 unless reviewed and saved from repeal through reenactment by the
158 Legislature.

159 (4) COORDINATION.--The commission shall coordinate its
160 work with community-based organizations, including those that
161 are faith-based; with schools, courts, certified local domestic
162 violence centers, adult and juvenile criminal justice systems,
163 and agencies providing social welfare, welfare transition, and
164 child support services; and with any appropriate research and
165 policy development centers, including, but not limited to, those
166 within universities that focus on issues related to families,
167 fatherhood, motherhood, low-income families, marriages, children
168 and poverty, scientific methods to determine paternity for the
169 purpose of addressing support issues, parenting, and
170 relationship skills.

171 (5) FUNDING.--The operation of the Commission on Marriage
172 and Family Support Initiatives shall be funded from general
173 revenue funds currently allocated to the Commission on
174 Responsible Fatherhood, shall maintain the current connection
175 with the Ounce of Prevention Fund, and shall support and
176 continue any community-based programs established by the
177 Commission on Responsible Fatherhood. The Commission on Marriage
178 and Family Support Initiatives may seek and accept grants or



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179 funds from any public source, federal, state, or local, to
180 supplement its operation and defray the expenses incurred in the
181 operation and implementation of this section.

182 Section 2. Sections 383.0112, 383.0113, and 383.0114,
183 Florida Statutes, are repealed.

184 Section 3. This act shall take effect July 1, 2003.