

By Senator Lynn

7-592-03

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

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

18
19 Section 1. The Commission on Marriage and Family
20 Support Initiatives.--

21 (1) LEGISLATIVE FINDINGS AND INTENT.--

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

27 (b) The Legislature finds that there are many problems
28 facing families, including, but not limited to, poverty,
29 exposure to crime and drugs, exposure to violence, and lack of
30 access to needed educational and job skills opportunities.

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

5 (d) The Legislature also finds that while some
6 relationships between mothers and fathers are broken and
7 beyond repair, others can be nurtured and salvaged with the
8 provision of appropriate community supports to fathers as well
9 as mothers. For parents, these supports may include
10 opportunities to obtain or increase educational levels and
11 employment skills, access to the justice system, support from
12 community agencies to help them become free of substance abuse
13 and violent relationships, and easy and affordable access to
14 relationship-skills education. For some unwed parents, it will
15 be possible and desirable to help them move towards marriage;
16 for others, the optimum goal may be to help them co-parent,
17 spend time with their child, and pay child support regularly.

18 (e) The Legislature finds that assisting states to end
19 dependence of low-income parents by promoting job preparation,
20 work, and marriage and assisting states in encouraging the
21 formation and maintenance of two-parent families are the two
22 of four stated purposes of federal welfare reform enacted in
23 1996 which have been largely neglected by states and that
24 states are now urging Congress to designate 10 percent of all
25 welfare funds for relationship education and skills
26 development, responsible fatherhood programs, and community
27 support as it seeks to reauthorize the Temporary Assistance
28 for Needy Families Act in 2002.

29 (f) The Legislature further finds that public policy
30 should not operate to force people to get married, should not
31 withdraw or diminish benefits to single mothers merely because

1 they are not married, and should not keep people in abusive
2 relationships.

3 (g) It is therefore the intent of the Legislature to
4 build on the accomplishments of the Commission on Responsible
5 Fatherhood, which has achieved recognition as a national model
6 of a comprehensive statewide strategy to address fatherhood
7 issues; to increase public awareness of the problems of
8 families, including failing marriages, violence, poverty,
9 substance abuse, and lack of access to community systems,
10 help, and other supports families need; and to continue to
11 develop sound public policy related to parenting, marriage,
12 and the effects of poverty, violence, and abuse on children
13 and their families through the work of the Commission on
14 Marriage and Family Support Initiatives. The Legislature
15 further intends that, to the extent practicable, the laws of
16 this state should do all that is possible to provide support
17 for children and encourage, promote, and value strong, safe,
18 long-term marriages and family life that includes
19 grandparents, family members, community support, and all that
20 children need to grow up healthy and to thrive.

21 (2) ESTABLISHMENT OF COMMISSION.--

22 (a) There is created within the Department of Children
23 and Family Services the Commission on Marriage and Family
24 Support Initiatives. The commission shall consist of 18
25 members, with six each appointed by the Governor, the
26 President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of
27 Representatives. At least 50 percent of the members of the
28 commission must be from the private sector. The commission
29 members shall include representatives of business, workforce
30 development, education, state government, local government,
31 the judicial system, the health care sector, the substance

1 abuse community, domestic violence centers, child development
2 organizations, and community and faith-based organizations.
3 The commission may also designate liaisons to work with it to
4 carry out its mission. Liaisons may be designated from state
5 and local government agencies and others as the commission
6 sees fit.

7 (b) Initially, the Governor, the President of the
8 Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives shall
9 each appoint as members meeting the qualifications contained
10 in paragraph (1), two members for a term of 3 years, two
11 members for a term of 2 years, and two members for a term of 1
12 year. Thereafter, after receiving recommendations from the
13 commission, the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the
14 Speaker of the House of Representatives shall appoint all
15 members for terms of 2 years. Any vacancy shall be filled by
16 appointment by the original appointing authority for the
17 unexpired portion of the term by a person who possesses the
18 proper qualifications for the vacancy.

19 (c) The members of the commission shall elect one
20 member to serve as chair. For the purpose of maintaining
21 continuity with the work of the Commission on Responsible
22 Fatherhood, the individual serving as the chair of the
23 Commission on Responsible Fatherhood at the time of the
24 effective date of this act shall remain as the chair of the
25 Commission on Marriage and Family Support Initiatives for a
26 term of 1 year, unless subsequently reelected by the members
27 of the commission.

28 (d) Members of the commission are not entitled to
29 compensation for their services as members, but may be
30 reimbursed for travel expenses as provided in section 112.061,
31 Florida Statutes.

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

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

5 (a) Develop a report that details comprehensive
6 statewide strategies for Florida to promote safe,
7 violence-free, substance-abuse-free, respectful, nurturing,
8 and responsible parenting, including connection or
9 reconnection of responsible parents, both mothers and fathers,
10 with their families and children.

11 (b) Develop a report that makes recommendations on how
12 to increase the availability of and access to parenting and
13 relationship skills education and training, and to encourage
14 and support the formation and maintenance of two-parent
15 families and family structures that are best for the children.
16 This shall include providing a plan for delivering services
17 and supports to couples and families to help them learn
18 communication and conflict-resolution skills prior to
19 marriage, enable couples to refresh those skills periodically
20 during marriage and, if the marriage fails, provide divorce
21 education, safety planning, and mediation techniques that
22 teach parents how to be safe and to work through their
23 problems and how to minimize the impact of the divorce on
24 their children.

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

28 (d) Develop a community awareness campaign to promote
29 community collaboration and coordinated grass-roots programs
30 that show how people, advocates, and agencies can work
31 together to promote marriage in Florida families.

1 (e) Serve as a clearinghouse for collecting and
2 disseminating information related to research findings on
3 poverty, violence, and other social forces and their effects
4 on families and innovative approaches to the delivery of
5 services necessary for the formation and maintenance of strong
6 families.

7 (f) By December 31 of each year, beginning December
8 31, 2003, issue an annual report to the Governor, the
9 President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of
10 Representatives, and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court on
11 progress it is making on its responsibilities.

12 (g) The Commission on Marriage and Family Support
13 Initiatives shall stand repealed on June 30, 2008, unless
14 reviewed and saved from repeal through reenactment by the
15 Legislature.

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

27 (5) FUNDING.--The operation of the Commission on
28 Marriage and Family Support Initiatives shall be funded from
29 general revenue funds currently allocated to the Commission on
30 Responsible Fatherhood, shall maintain the current connection
31 with the Ounce of Prevention Fund, and shall support and

1 continue any community-based programs established by the
2 Commission on Responsible Fatherhood. The Commission on
3 Marriage and Family Support Initiatives may seek and accept
4 grants, funds, or gifts from any source, public or private,
5 federal, state, or local, to supplement its operation and
6 defray the expenses incurred in the operation and
7 implementation of this section.

8 Section 2. Sections 383.0112, 383.0113, and 383.0114,
9 Florida Statutes, are repealed.

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

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13 SENATE SUMMARY

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