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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.--The Legislature
22 finds that:

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

27 (b) There are many problems facing families.

28 (c) Florida is a state rich in diversity, and its
29 population and families come from all over the world,
30 representing many cultures, languages, belief systems, and
31 experiences.

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

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

25 (f) Public policy should not operate to force people
26 to get married, should not withdraw or diminish benefits to
27 single mothers merely because they are not married, and should
28 not keep people in abusive relationships.

29
30 It is therefore the intent of the Legislature to build on the
31 accomplishments of the Commission on Responsible Fatherhood,

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

17 (2) ESTABLISHMENT OF COMMISSION.--

18 (a) There is created within the Department of Children
19 and Family Services, for administrative purposes, a
20 commission, as defined in section 20.03(10), Florida Statutes,
21 called the Commission on Marriage and Family Support
22 Initiatives. The commission is independent of the head of the
23 department. The commission is authorized to hire an executive
24 director, a researcher, and an administrative assistant. The
25 executive director shall report to, and serve at the pleasure
26 of, the commission.

27 (b) The commission shall consist of 18 members. The
28 commission shall consist of members from the public sector and
29 the private sector, including community and faith-based
30 organizations, but at least 50 percent of the commissioners
31 shall be from the private sector. Commissioners should have

1 experience in one or more of the following areas: business;
2 workforce development; education; health care; treatment of
3 substance abuse; child development; and domestic violence
4 prevention. For the initial appointments, the Governor, the
5 President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of
6 Representative shall consider making appointments from the
7 current members of the Commission on Responsible Fatherhood.

8 (c) The Governor, the President of the Senate, and the
9 Speaker of the House of Representatives shall each appoint six
10 members to the commission. Initial appointments shall be made
11 by August 1, 2003. Each commissioner shall serve a 2-year
12 term, except that for the initial appointments to the
13 commission, the Governor, the President of the Senate and the
14 Speaker of the House of Representatives shall each appoint two
15 members for a term of 3 years, two members for a term of 2
16 years, and two members for a term of 1 year. A vacancy shall
17 be filled by appointment by the original appointing authority
18 for the unexpired portion of the term.

19 (d) The first meeting of the commission shall be no
20 later than October 1, 2003. Commissioners shall elect a chair
21 at the first meeting by a majority vote of the members
22 present, a quorum being present. A majority of the membership
23 constitutes a quorum.

24 (e) A quorum shall be required for the commission to
25 meet and to conduct business. The commission shall meet
26 semiannually and more frequently upon call of the chair. The
27 commission may conduct its meetings through teleconferences or
28 other similar means.

29 (f) Commissioners are not entitled to compensation for
30 their services as members, but may be reimbursed for per diem
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1 and travel expenses as provided in section 112.061, Florida
2 Statutes.

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

4 (a) Develop the following documents by October 1,
5 2004, and, upon their completion, submit a copy to the
6 Governor, the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the
7 House of Representatives, and the secretary of the department:

8 1. A report that details comprehensive statewide
9 strategies for Florida to promote safe, violence-free,
10 substance-abuse-free, respectful, nurturing, and responsible
11 parenting, including connection or reconnection of responsible
12 parents, both mothers and fathers, with their families and
13 children;

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

28 3. A promising practices manual or tool that
29 highlights successful efforts at promoting marriage and
30 Florida families and family life.

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1 (b) Develop a community awareness campaign to promote
2 community collaboration and coordinated grass-roots programs
3 that show how people, advocates, and agencies can work
4 together to promote marriage in Florida families.

5 (c) Serve as a clearinghouse for collecting and
6 disseminating information related to research findings on
7 poverty, violence, and other social forces and their effects
8 on families and innovative approaches to the delivery of
9 services necessary for the formation and maintenance of strong
10 families.

11 (d) By December 31 of each year, beginning December
12 31, 2003, issue an annual report to the Governor, the
13 President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of
14 Representatives, and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court on
15 progress it is making on its responsibilities.

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 scientific methods to determine paternity for the purpose of
27 addressing support issues, parenting, and relationship skills.

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

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

8 (6) This section is repealed on June 30, 2008, unless
9 reviewed and saved from repeal through reenactment by the
10 Legislature.

11 Section 2. Sections 383.0112, 383.0113, and 383.0114,
12 Florida Statutes, are repealed.

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