

SENATE STAFF ANALYSIS AND ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

Prepared By: Commerce and Consumer Services Committee

BILL: SB 242

INTRODUCER: Senator Lynn

SUBJECT: Religious-Exempt Child Care Programs

DATE: January 10, 2006

REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Sanford	Whiddon	CF	Fav/1 Amendment
2.	Gordon	Cooper	CM	Favorable
3.			HA	
4.				
5.				
6.				

Please see last section for Summary of Amendments

- Technical amendments were recommended
- Amendments were recommended
- Significant amendments were recommended

I. Summary:

Senate Bill 242, also known as the Zaniyah Hinson Act,¹ requires religious-affiliated child care programs and weekday preschool programs to be members or participants of, or be accredited by, an accrediting agency recognized by the Department of Children and Family Services (DCF or the department) in order to qualify for the religious exemption from licensure as a child care facility. The bill also establishes requirements for an accrediting agency to be recognized. These accrediting requirements would generally apply the minimum standards for licensed child care facilities to religious-exempt programs, with certain exemptions, and would require the accrediting agencies to mandate that religious-exempt programs comply with the agency's accrediting standards.

This bill substantially amends section 402.316, Florida Statutes.

¹ Two-year old Zaniyah Hinson died on August 10, 2001, after being left in a locked van by child care workers employed by the church-run child care facility she attended. Daytona Beach News Journal, Special Report: "Daycare Death." 2003. < <http://www.news-journalonline.com/special/daycare/>>.

II. Present Situation:

Religious-Exempt Child Care Facilities

Since 1974, the Legislature has mandated the statewide licensure of child care facilities.² These “child care facilities” include any child care center or child care arrangement that provides child care for more than five children unrelated to the operator and which receives a payment, fee, or grant for any of the children receiving care, wherever operated, and whether or not operated for profit (s. 402.302(2), F.S.).

The 1974 legislation, however, exempted from licensure a child care facility that is an integral part of a church or parochial school conducting regularly scheduled classes, courses of study, or educational programs accredited by, or a member of, an organization that publishes and requires compliance with its standards for health, safety, and sanitation.³ This exemption for these child care facilities (commonly referred to as “religious-exempt” facilities) remains under current law, except that the child care personnel operating religious-exempt facilities must now complete the same background-screening requirements as child care personnel in licensed child care facilities (s. 402.316(1), F.S.). In addition, religious-exempt facilities must comply with the requirements of local governments for health, sanitation, and safety.

For those child care facilities required to be licensed, DCF is required to adopt rules prescribing minimum licensing standards (s. 402.305(1), F.S.). These minimum licensing standards are not required for religious-exempt facilities. Instead, current law requires a religious-exempt facility to be accredited by, or a member of, an organization that publishes and requires compliance with its standards for health, safety, and sanitation. However, current law does not provide minimum accrediting standards or provide a mechanism to certify whether an accrediting organization’s requirements are met by a religious-exempt facility.

Religious-exempt facilities may choose to be licensed but cannot withdraw from licensure once they are licensed (s. 402.316(3), F.S.). Of the 1,412 child care facilities in the state which are eligible for the religious exemption under s. 402.316, F.S., currently 892 facilities have chosen to be licensed child care facilities and 520 facilities have chosen to be religious-exempt facilities.⁴

Minimum Licensing Standards for Child Care Facilities

Current law establishes a framework for the department’s minimum standards required for licensed child care facilities and provides certain minimum requirements that must be included within the department’s rules (s. 402.305, F.S.). This framework includes minimum requirements for each of the following regulatory items:

- **Personnel:** Qualifications for child care personnel, including background screening, age requirements, training, continuing education, and staff credentials (s. 402.305(2) and (3), F.S.);

² See ch. 74-113, L.O.F.

³ Section 16(1), ch. 74-113, L.O.F.

⁴ Data current as of June 1, 2005.

- **Staff-to-children ratios:** Staff-to-children ratios, which require greater supervision for younger children (s. 402.305(4), F.S.);
- **Physical facilities:** Physical facilities, including requirements for building conditions, play space, bathroom facilities, and equipment (s. 402.305(5), F.S.);
- **Square footage:** Square footage per child for indoor floor space and outdoor play area (s. 402.305(6), F.S.);
- **Sanitation and safety:** Sanitation and safety, including first aid treatment, emergency procedures, sanitary and safety conditions, and pediatric cardiopulmonary resuscitation (s. 402.305(7), F.S.);
- **Nutritional practices:** Provision of meals and snacks that meet nutritional needs of children (s. 402.305(8), F.S.);
- **Admissions and recordkeeping:** Requirements for periodic health examinations, immunizations, and maintenance of emergency information and health records (s. 402.305(9), F.S.);
- **Transportation safety:** Requirements for seat belts in vehicles, annual inspections of vehicles, limits on the number of children in vehicles, and accountability for children being transported (s. 402.305(10), F.S.);
- **Parental access:** Reasonable parental access to the facility while the child is in care (s. 402.305(11), F.S.);
- **Child discipline:** Age-appropriate, constructive disciplinary practices and notification to parents of these practices (s. 402.305(12), F.S.);
- **Plan of activities:** Daily plan of varied activities, including active and quiet play opportunities appropriate to the age of the child (s. 402.305(13), F.S.);
- **Urban child care facilities:** Modified licensing standards for child care facilities located in urban areas (s. 402.305(14), F.S.);
- **Evening and weekend child care:** Modified licensing standards for child care facilities providing evening or weekend child care (s. 402.305(16), F.S.); and
- **Transfer of ownership:** Parental notification of the transfer of ownership of a child care facility (s. 402.305(18), F.S.).

With the exception of requirements for background screening of child care personnel, these minimum standards do not apply to religious-exempt facilities (s. 402.316(1), F.S.), unless required by a facility's accrediting organization.

Exemptions from Licensure

Under current law, child care facilities must be licensed by DCF and meet certain minimum licensing standards adopted by the department (ss. 402.305 and 402.312, F.S.),⁵ unless the facility is specifically exempted from the definition of a child care facility, is exempted from

⁵ The licensure of child care facilities is administered by the Child Care Services Program Office of the Department of Children and Family Services or, in seven counties (Alachua, Brevard, Broward, Hillsborough, Palm Beach, Pinellas, and Sarasota) by local licensing agencies that have licensing standards meeting or exceeding the department's minimum standards (see ss. 402.306 and 402.307, F.S.).

licensure, or does not provide services considered to be “child care.”⁶ The following facilities or programs are not required to be licensed:

1) Exempted from the definition of a child care facility:

- Summer camps having children in full-time residence (s. 402.302(2)(b), F.S.);
- Summer day camps (s. 402.302(2)(c), F.S.);
- Vacation Bible schools (s. 402.302(2)(d), F.S.); and
- Child care services for guests in transient public lodging establishments (s. 402.302(2)(e), F.S.).

2) Exempted from licensure:

- **Public schools:** Programs for children in grades kindergarten (five years of age) or higher, programs for children three years to five years of age operated and staffed by the public school, and programs for preschool children with disabilities who are younger than three years of age (ss. 402.302(2)(a) and 402.3025(1)(a), F.S.);
- **Nonpublic schools:** Programs for children in grades kindergarten (five years of age) or higher and, if a majority of the children enrolled in the nonpublic school are five years of age or older, programs for children three years to five years of age operated and staffed by the nonpublic school (ss. 402.302(2)(a) and 402.3025(2)(b) and (c), F.S.); and
- **Religious-exempt facilities:** Child care facilities that are an integral part of a church or parochial school conducting regularly scheduled classes, courses of study, or educational programs accredited by, or by a member of, an organization that publishes and requires compliance with its standards for health, safety, and sanitation (s. 402.316, F.S.).

3) Does not provide “child care”:

- **Membership organizations:** Membership organizations affiliated with national organizations which do not provide child care, whose primary purpose is providing activities contributing to the development of good character or sportsmanship or to the education or cultural development of minors (s. 402.301(6), F.S.); and
- **After-school programs:** After-school programs that do not provide child care (ss. 402.3045 and 402.305(1)(c), F.S.).

In addition, current law provides for separate licensure or registration requirements for family day care homes (s. 402.313, F.S.), large family child care homes (s. 402.3131, F.S.), and specialized child care facilities for the care of mildly ill children (s. 402.305(17), F.S.).

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

Religious-Exempt Child Care Programs

This bill substantially revises the licensure exemption for religious-affiliated child care facilities in s. 402.316, F.S. The bill specifies that this religious exemption applies to a child care program or weekday preschool program that is an integral part of any established religious school or

⁶ Under current law, the term “child care” means the care, protection, and supervision of a child, for a period of less than 24 hours a day on a regular basis, which supplements parental care, enrichment, and health supervision for the child, in accordance with his or her individual needs, and for which a payment, fee, or grant is made for care (s. 402.302(1), F.S.).

congregation conducting regularly scheduled classes, courses of study, or educational programs. Thus, the bill extends the religious exemption under current law to programs that are an integral part of a temple.⁷

To qualify for the religious exemption, the bill requires a religious program to be a member or participant of, or accredited by, a state, regional, or national accrediting agency that is recognized by DCF.⁸

The bill retains requirements under current law that child care personnel in religious-exempt programs must undergo background screenings and that religious-exempt programs may choose to be licensed; however, the bill deletes a requirement in current law that religious-exempt programs may not withdraw from licensure once they choose to be licensed (see s. 402.316(3), F.S.).

The bill requires each religious-exempt program to display a certificate of compliance issued by a recognized accrediting agency in a conspicuous location in the facility. The bill also specifies that failure to post the certificate will result in an administrative action determined by the program's accrediting agency.

The bill provides that a religious-exempt program is solely responsible for its day-to-day operations and compliance with applicable state laws and the minimum standards of its accrediting agency.

Recognition of Accrediting Agencies

The bill directs DCF to maintain a list of all recognized accrediting agencies and specify the agencies' standards. The bill requires the department to review the minimum standards adopted by each accrediting agency seeking to be recognized and requires the department to recognize an accrediting agency, if the agency:

- Adopts minimum accrediting standards for religious-exempt programs which meet or exceed the department's minimum standards for licensed child care facilities, except for standards governing child discipline, urban child care facilities, specialized child care facilities for the care of mildly ill children, or parental notification of the transfer of ownership of a child care facility;
- Publishes the minimum accrediting standards and requires each religious-exempt program to comply with those standards;
- Submits a copy of its published accrediting standards to the department for review, which must be reviewed by the department within 30 days after submission;
- Requires each religious-exempt program to comply with the requirements of local governments for health, sanitation, and safety, including minimum requirements for environmental health, fire safety, zoning, and building codes; and stipulates that local governments have the authority to enforce such codes;

⁷ Under current law, the religious exemption applies to a facility that is an integral part of a church or parochial school conducting regularly scheduled classes, courses of study, or educational programs (s. 402.316, F.S.).

⁸ Under current law, accrediting organizations are not required to be recognized by the department (s. 402.316, F.S.).

- Requires each religious-exempt program to inform parents that the program is exempt from licensure but meets the minimum standards of the accrediting agency;
- Conducts an initial on-site review of each religious-exempt program and annually receives a notarized statement from each religious-exempt program verifying compliance with applicable state laws and the accrediting agency's published minimum standards; and
- Requires each religious-exempt program to mandate the child care personnel employed by the program to comply with standards that meet or exceed the training requirements for child care personnel in licensed child care facilities.

Although the religious exemption in current law requires accrediting organizations to publish and require compliance with standards for health, safety, and sanitation (s. 402.316(1), F.S.), current law does not require the accrediting organizations to adhere to the department's minimum standards for licensed child care facilities. The bill will consequently require religious-exempt programs to comply with certain minimum standards that may not be required by accrediting organizations under current law.

Phase-In of Training and Credentialing Requirements

The bill requires recognized accrediting agencies to mandate that child care personnel employed by religious-exempt programs begin a 40-clock-hour introductory course in child care, approved by DCF, by October 1, 2006, or within 90 days after employment and complete the training within one year after the date the training begins.

In addition, the bill requires recognized accrediting agencies to mandate that religious-exempt programs meet or exceed the requirements for staff credentials which apply to licensed child care facilities by July 1, 2010. Under current law, a licensed child care facility operating eight hours or more per week must have, for every 20 children, at least one child care personnel who has a child development associate or equivalent credential (s. 402.305(3), F.S.). The bill also directs the department and the accrediting agencies to work collaboratively to expedite the approval of equivalency programs developed by the accrediting agencies.

Limitation on the Department's Authority

The bill specifies that these provisions do not authorize DCF to regulate or control an accrediting agency or to regulate or control the governance, religious curriculum, academic curriculum, testing or assessments, evaluation procedures, academic requirements of the staff, discipline, or hiring practices of a religious-exempt program.

Revision of Minimum Licensing Standards

The bill requires DCF to distribute each revision made to the department's minimum standards for licensed child care facilities to each recognized accrediting agency within 30 days after the revision is adopted.

The bill specifies that each recognized accrediting agency must, within 30 days after receipt of the revised minimum standards, notify the department that the agency has notified each

religious-exempt program of the revised standards. The bill directs that the revised standards be incorporated into the next revision of the accrediting agency's minimum standards.

Notices and Annual Reports

The bill requires each recognized accrediting agency to submit an annual report to DCF. The report must include an updated listing of the accrediting agency's religious-exempt programs. The bill requires recognized accrediting agencies to notify the department within 30 days after a new religious-exempt program comes into affiliation with the agency or after a program terminates its affiliation. The bill also requires a religious-exempt program to provide 30 days advance notice to the accrediting agency before transferring to another accrediting agency.

Agencies Prohibited from Accrediting Their Own Religious-Exempt Programs

The bill prohibits a recognized accrediting agency from owning, operating, or administering a religious-exempt program under its certificate of approval.

Annual Meeting

The bill requires DCF to facilitate an annual meeting with the accrediting agencies, health and safety officials, and child advocates to exchange ideas for ensuring the health and safety of children in child care and preschool programs.

Effective Date

The bill provides an effective date of July 1, 2006.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

D. Other Constitutional Issues:

The question of government authority to regulate religious-affiliated child care facilities, or to exempt these religious-affiliated facilities from licensure, under the Free Exercise Clause and Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the federal constitution has been addressed by several federal courts. In *North Valley Baptist Church v. McMahan*, 696 F. Supp. 518 (E.D. Calif. 1988), the court held that a California law requiring

religious-affiliated day care centers and preschools to be licensed and adhere to state regulations did not violate the Free Exercise Clause or the Establishment Clause. In *Forest Hills Early Learning Center v. Grace Baptist Church*, 846 F.2d 260 (4th Cir. 1988), the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit held that a Virginia law exempting religious-affiliated child care centers from the state's licensing requirements did not violate the Establishment Clause. Citing *Forest Hills*, in *Forte v. Coler*, 725 F. Supp. 488 (M.D. Fla. 1989), the court upheld Florida's religious exemption, ruling that the state's law exempting child care facilities that are an integral part of church or parochial schools from compliance with state licensing requirements did not violate the Establishment Clause.

The bill does not require the licensure of religious-affiliated child care programs but requires these programs to comply with many of the state's licensing requirements through accrediting standards adopted by accrediting agencies recognized by DCF.

V. Economic Impact and Fiscal Note:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

The bill does not require the licensure of religious-affiliated child care programs but requires these programs to comply with many of the state's licensing requirements through accrediting standards adopted by accrediting agencies recognized by the Department of Children and Family Services. Although the religious exemption in current law requires accrediting organizations to publish and require compliance with standards for health, safety, and sanitation (s. 402.316(1), F.S.), current law does not require the accrediting organizations to adhere to the department's minimum standards for licensed child care facilities. The bill consequently would require some portion of the 520 religious-exempt facilities in this state to comply with minimum standards that may not be required by accrediting organizations under current law. Compliance with the department's minimum standards would likely cause these religious-exempt facilities to incur costs not required under current law.

Some religious-exempt programs may, however, qualify for exemption from licensure as nonpublic schools (see ss. 402.302(2)(a) and 402.3025(2)(b) and (c), F.S.). These programs would not be subject to the minimum standards required by the bill.

C. Government Sector Impact:

The bill requires DCF to process requests for recognition of religious accrediting agencies, to review the agencies' published accrediting standards and recognize qualified agencies, to maintain a list of all recognized accrediting agencies, to distribute changes in the department's licensing standards to the accrediting agencies, and to facilitate an annual meeting with the accrediting agencies, health and safety officials, and child

advocates. The department estimates the cost of the additional workload engendered by this bill will be \$71,344 in the first year and \$68,098 in the second year.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

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

VIII. Summary of Amendments:

Barcode 245954 by Children and Families.

Provides that, in any county in which there is a local licensing agency approved by the department, the local licensing agency may continue to recognize a county accrediting agency for religious exemption.

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