

By Senator Book

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1                                   A bill to be entitled  
2       An act relating to an Early Childhood Court program;  
3       creating s. 39.01304, F.S.; providing legislative  
4       findings and intent; defining terms; requiring the  
5       Office of the State Courts Administrator, by a  
6       specified date, to verify the existence of an Early  
7       Childhood Court program at certain circuit courts;  
8       requiring the office to coordinate with the  
9       appropriate circuit court to employ and train a  
10      community coordinator for each program site;  
11      authorizing the office to hire a statewide community  
12      coordinator; requiring the Florida State University  
13      Center for Prevention and Early Intervention Policy to  
14      hire a statewide clinical consultant and assemble a  
15      clinical oversight team for specified purposes;  
16      establishing the primary goal of the program and the  
17      means of achieving the goal; requiring that the  
18      program be modeled on a specified approach for  
19      specified purposes; requiring the program to  
20      incorporate specified core components; requiring the  
21      office, in partnership with the center and within  
22      appropriated funds, to provide training to program  
23      court teams; requiring the Florida Institute for Child  
24      Welfare to conduct an evaluation of the program's  
25      impact in consultation with the Department of Children  
26      and Families, the office, the center, and a specified  
27      organization; requiring the evaluation to include  
28      certain data and recommendations; requiring the  
29      institute to submit the results of its evaluation to

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30 the Governor, the Legislature, and the Office of  
31 Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability  
32 by a specified date; requiring the institute to submit  
33 annual reports; providing an effective date.  
34

35 Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:  
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37 Section 1. Section 39.01304, Florida Statutes, is created  
38 to read:

39 39.01304 Early Childhood Court program.—

40 (1) LEGISLATIVE FINDINGS AND INTENT.—

41 (a) The Legislature finds that a child's first 1,000 days  
42 of life are a critical period during which he or she faces  
43 either the greatest risk of having to endure lifelong adversity  
44 or the greatest opportunity for long-term well-being with a  
45 stable nurturing caregiver.

46 (b) The Legislature also finds it is important to identify  
47 evidence-based practices and developmentally appropriate  
48 strategies to mitigate the impact of trauma on young children  
49 placed in the state's dependency system and to improve outcomes  
50 for them and their families.

51 (c) The Legislature further finds positive results  
52 associated with the Safe Babies Court Team approach, advanced by  
53 the national ZERO TO THREE nonprofit organization, which  
54 achieves timely permanency, increases a child's well-being, and  
55 greatly reduces recurrence of child abuse through the  
56 development and use of specialized dockets, multidisciplinary  
57 teams, and a nonadversarial approach in connection with  
58 dependency proceedings.

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59 (d) It is the intent of the Legislature to provide  
60 resources to expand upon the existing specialized Early  
61 Childhood Court dockets to ensure their adherence to the Safe  
62 Babies Court Team approach. The Legislature also seeks to assess  
63 the potential benefits to Florida's children and families from  
64 adopting this approach and determine whether expansion of the  
65 Early Childhood Court concept in this state is warranted.

66 (2) DEFINITIONS.—As used in this section, the term:

67 (a) "Community coordinator" means an individual who works  
68 with a judge presiding over an Early Childhood Court, who  
69 supports the activities of the court, and who facilitates  
70 coordination and collaboration among the members of the Early  
71 Childhood Court team.

72 (b) "Early Childhood Court" means a program that has a  
73 specialized court docket created under this section which is  
74 modeled after the national ZERO TO THREE Safe Babies Court Team  
75 approach and which addresses child welfare cases involving  
76 children under 3 years of age.

77 (c) "Safe Babies Court Team" means a ZERO TO THREE  
78 community engagement and systems change initiative focused on  
79 improving how the courts, child welfare agencies, and related  
80 child-serving organizations work together to improve and  
81 expedite services for young children in out-of-home care.

82 (d) "ZERO TO THREE" means the national nonprofit  
83 organization that informs, trains, and supports professionals,  
84 policymakers, and parents in efforts to improve and promote the  
85 health and development of children under 3 years of age.

86 (3) PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT.—

87 (a) By August 1, 2018, the Office of the State Courts

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88 Administrator shall verify the existence of an Early Childhood  
89 Court program at each circuit court site that established a  
90 specialized Early Childhood Court docket before July 1, 2018.  
91 Multiple program sites may exist in the same county. The Office  
92 of the State Courts Administrator shall coordinate with the  
93 appropriate circuit court to hire and train a full-time  
94 community coordinator at each Early Childhood Court program site  
95 that was verified pursuant to this paragraph and may hire a  
96 statewide community coordinator to implement the program.

97 (b) The Florida State University Center for Prevention and  
98 Early Intervention Policy shall hire a statewide clinical  
99 consultant and assemble a clinical oversight team to ensure  
100 quality, accountability, and fidelity to the Early Childhood  
101 Court model, including, but not limited to, training and  
102 technical assistance related to clinical services, clinical  
103 consultation and guidance for difficult cases, ongoing clinical  
104 training for court teams, and training in child-parent  
105 psychotherapy to expand clinical capacity and support of the  
106 professional development of clinicians at each Early Childhood  
107 Court program site.

108 (4) GOALS.—The primary goal of the Early Childhood Court  
109 program is to improve outcomes of children under 3 years of age  
110 in Florida's child welfare system by doing all of the following:

111 (a) Improving child safety and well-being.

112 (b) Addressing parents' trauma-related conditions and  
113 associated issues, including, but not limited to, substance  
114 abuse, mental health concerns, and family violence, and  
115 repairing relationships between parents and their children.

116 (c) Achieving timely permanency.

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117 (d) Preventing recurrences of maltreatment.

118 (e) Ending the intergenerational cycle of abuse, neglect,  
119 and violence.

120 (5) CORE COMPONENTS.—The program shall be modeled after the  
121 national ZERO TO THREE Safe Babies Court Team approach and shall  
122 promote the adoption of its community engagement and systems  
123 change initiatives to improve coordination between the courts,  
124 child welfare agencies, and related organizations for the  
125 benefit of children under 3 years of age placed in out-of-home  
126 care. The program shall incorporate, but not be limited to, all  
127 of the following core components of the Safe Babies Court Team  
128 approach:

129 (a) An engaged and informed judge who leads the court team  
130 in applying a therapeutic approach.

131 (b) A continuum of evidence-based mental health  
132 interventions to address the parent-child attachment, to heal  
133 trauma, and to promote healthy relationships.

134 (c) An Early Childhood Court community coordinator who  
135 works with the judge to support Early Childhood Court  
136 activities.

137 (6) TRAINING.—Within appropriated funds, the Office of the  
138 State Courts Administrator, in partnership with the Florida  
139 State University Center for Prevention and Early Intervention  
140 Policy, shall provide training to the participating court teams  
141 on meeting the program objectives.

142 (7) EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAM.—

143 (a) In consultation with the department, the Office of the  
144 State Courts Administrator, the Florida State University Center  
145 for Prevention and Early Intervention Policy, and the ZERO TO

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146 THREE organization, the Florida Institute for Child Welfare  
147 established in s. 1004.615 shall evaluate the impact of the  
148 Early Childhood Court program on children and families in  
149 Florida's child welfare system.

150 (b) The evaluation must include the analysis of data  
151 collected by the Office of the State Courts Administrator and  
152 measurable outcomes, including, but not limited to, the impact  
153 of the Early Childhood Court program on the future incidence of  
154 maltreatment of children whose cases were heard in Early  
155 Childhood Court, timely permanency, reunification of families,  
156 and incidents of children reentering the child welfare system  
157 whose cases were heard in Early Childhood Court. The evaluation  
158 must provide recommendations as to whether and how the program  
159 should be expanded, the projected costs of such expansion, and  
160 projected savings to the state resulting from the Early  
161 Childhood Court program.

162 (c) The institute shall submit the results of the  
163 evaluation to the Governor, the President of the Senate, the  
164 Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the Office of  
165 Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability by October  
166 1, 2021.

167 (8) ANNUAL REPORTS.—By December 1, 2019 and 2020, the  
168 Florida Institute for Child Welfare shall provide reports on the  
169 status of the program to the Governor, the President of the  
170 Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the  
171 Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability.

172 Section 2. This act shall take effect July 1, 2018.