

By the Committee on Children, Families, and Elder Affairs; and  
Senator Book

586-01160-19

201990c1

1                   A bill to be entitled  
2       An act relating to early childhood courts; creating s.  
3       39.01304, F.S.; providing legislative intent;  
4       authorizing circuit courts to create early childhood  
5       court programs; requiring that early childhood court  
6       programs have certain components present; providing  
7       requirements and guidelines for the Office of the  
8       State Courts Administrator when hiring community  
9       coordinators and a statewide training specialist;  
10      authorizing the office to provide funding to circuit  
11      courts that choose to establish a coordination system  
12      in lieu of creating a community coordinator position;  
13      requiring the office to contract with certain  
14      university-based centers; requiring the university-  
15      based centers to hire a clinical director; requiring  
16      the Florida Institute for Child Welfare to submit  
17      certain status reports to the Governor and the  
18      Legislature by specified dates; requiring the  
19      institute, in consultation with the Department of  
20      Children and Families, the office, and the contracted  
21      university-based centers, to conduct an evaluation of  
22      the court programs' impact; requiring the evaluation  
23      to include the analysis of certain data and  
24      recommendations; requiring the institute to submit the  
25      results of its evaluation to the Governor and the  
26      Legislature by a specified date; providing an  
27      effective date.

28  
29   Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

586-01160-19

201990c1

30  
31 Section 1. Section 39.01304, Florida Statutes, is created  
32 to read:

33 39.01304 Early childhood court programs.-

34 (1) It is the intent of the Legislature to encourage the  
35 department, the Department of Health, the Association of Early  
36 Learning Coalitions, and other such agencies, local governments,  
37 interested public or private entities, and individuals to  
38 support the creation and establishment of early childhood court  
39 programs. The purpose of an early childhood court program is to  
40 address the root cause of court involvement through specialized  
41 dockets, multidisciplinary teams, evidence-based treatment, and  
42 the use of a nonadversarial approach. Such programs depend on  
43 the leadership of a judge or magistrate who is educated about  
44 the science of early childhood development and who requires  
45 rigorous efforts to heal children physically and emotionally in  
46 the context of a broad collaboration among professionals from  
47 different systems working directly in the court as a team,  
48 recognizing that the parent-child relationship is the foundation  
49 of child well-being.

50 (2) A circuit court may create an early childhood court  
51 program to serve the needs of infants and toddlers in dependency  
52 court. An early childhood court program must have all of the  
53 following components present:

54 (a) Therapeutic jurisprudence, which must drive every  
55 aspect of judicial practice. The judge or magistrate must  
56 support the therapeutic needs of the parent and child in a  
57 nonadversarial manner. As used in this paragraph, the term  
58 "therapeutic jurisprudence" means the study of how the law may

586-01160-19

201990c1

59 be used as a therapeutic agent and focuses on how laws impact  
60 emotional and psychological well-being.

61 (b) A procedure for coordinating services and resources for  
62 families who have a case on the court docket. To meet this  
63 requirement, the court may create and fill at least one  
64 community coordinator position pursuant to paragraph (3)(a) or  
65 the court may use a coordination system that implements a  
66 progression of services.

67 (c) A multidisciplinary team made up of key community  
68 stakeholders who commit to work with the judge or magistrate to  
69 restructure the way the community responds to the needs of  
70 maltreated children. The team may include, but is not limited  
71 to, early intervention specialists; mental health and infant  
72 mental health professionals; attorneys representing children,  
73 parents, and the child welfare system; children's advocates;  
74 early learning coalitions and child care providers; substance  
75 abuse program providers; primary health care providers; domestic  
76 violence advocates; and guardians ad litem. The  
77 multidisciplinary team must address the need for children in an  
78 early childhood court program to receive medical care in a  
79 medical home, a screening for developmental delays conducted by  
80 the local agency responsible for complying with part C of the  
81 federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and quality  
82 child care.

83 (d) A continuum of mental health services that include a  
84 focus on the parent-child relationship and that must be  
85 appropriate for each child and family served.

86 (3) Contingent upon an annual appropriation by the  
87 Legislature, and subject to available resources:

586-01160-19

201990c1

88       (a) The Office of the State Courts Administrator shall  
89 coordinate with each participating circuit court to create and  
90 fill at least one community coordinator position for the  
91 circuit's early childhood court program unless the court chooses  
92 to establish a coordination system in lieu of creating a  
93 community coordinator position. Each community coordinator shall  
94 provide direct support to the program by providing coordination  
95 between the multidisciplinary team and the judiciary,  
96 coordinating the responsibilities of the participating agencies  
97 and service providers, and managing the collection of data for  
98 program evaluation and accountability. If a circuit court  
99 establishes a coordination system in lieu of creating a  
100 community coordinator position, the Office of the State Courts  
101 Administrator may provide funding equivalent in value to a  
102 community coordinator position to the court for case  
103 coordination functions.

104       (b) The Office of the State Courts Administrator shall  
105 contract with one or more university-based centers that have  
106 expertise in infant mental health, and such university-based  
107 centers shall hire a clinical director charged with ensuring the  
108 quality, accountability, and fidelity of the program's evidence-  
109 based treatment and ensuring that each center under contract  
110 receives training and technical assistance related to clinical  
111 services, clinical consultation and guidance for difficult  
112 cases, and ongoing clinical training for court teams. In  
113 partnership with each center, the Office of the State Courts  
114 Administrator may hire a statewide training specialist to  
115 provide training to each multidisciplinary team.

116       (c) By December 1 of 2020 and 2021, the Florida Institute

586-01160-19

201990c1

117 for Child Welfare shall provide a status report on  
118 implementation of the programs to the Governor, the President of  
119 the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

120 (d) In consultation with the department, the Office of the  
121 State Courts Administrator, and each center, the Florida  
122 Institute for Child Welfare shall evaluate the impact of the  
123 early childhood court programs on children and families in the  
124 state's child welfare system. The evaluation must include the  
125 analysis of data collected by the Office of the State Courts  
126 Administrator and measurable outcomes, including, but not  
127 limited to, the impact of the early childhood court program on  
128 the future incidence of maltreatment of children, timely  
129 permanency, reunification of families, and incidents of children  
130 reentering the child welfare system. The evaluation must provide  
131 recommendations as to whether and how the programs should be  
132 expanded, the projected costs of any such expansion, and the  
133 projected savings to the state resulting from the programs.  
134 After providing the status reports pursuant to paragraph (c),  
135 and by October 1, 2022, the institute shall provide a report on  
136 the results of the evaluation to the Governor, the President of  
137 the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

138 Section 2. This act shall take effect July 1, 2019.