

1 A bill to be entitled

2 An act relating to the Early Learning Scholarship
3 Program; creating s. 1002.935, F.S.; establishing the
4 Early Learning Scholarship Program; requiring the
5 program to be administered by the Office of Early
6 Learning; providing the purpose of the program;
7 specifying program eligibility criteria; requiring
8 program funds to be used for a specified purpose;
9 providing for the administration of the program;
10 requiring the office to report on the program;
11 specifying certain information be included in the
12 report; specifying provider eligibility criteria;
13 exempting the state from liability; requiring the
14 office to adopt rules; providing an effective date.

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

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18 Section 1. Section 1002.935, Florida Statutes, is created
19 to read:

20 1002.935 Early Learning Scholarship Program.—

21 (1) PURPOSE.—There is established the Early Learning
22 Scholarship Program to be administered by the Office of Early
23 Learning. The program is established in order to increase access
24 to high-quality early childhood programs.

25 (2) ELIGIBILITY.—A child from birth to the beginning of

26 | the school year for which the child is eligible for admission to
 27 | kindergarten in a public school under s. 1003.21(1)(a)2., is
 28 | eligible for a scholarship under this program if the child is:

29 | (a) A resident of the state.

30 | (b) The sibling of a child who is medically complex and
 31 | the medical condition is such that the child is technologically
 32 | dependent upon medical equipment or procedures to sustain life
 33 | and who can expire without warning, unless continually under
 34 | observation.

35 | (c) Not enrolled in a school readiness program under s.
 36 | 1002.87 or a prekindergarten program under s. 1002.55, s.
 37 | 1002.61, or s. 1002.63.

38 | (d) Not receiving any other scholarship established under
 39 | this chapter.

40 | (3) USE OF FUNDS.—Funds awarded under the program shall be
 41 | used for part-time child care or early childhood education
 42 | services from a provider that meets the requirements of
 43 | subsection (5).

44 | (4) ADMINISTRATION.—

45 | (a) Subject to the appropriation of funds by the
 46 | Legislature, the office shall annually coordinate with early
 47 | learning coalitions to issue scholarships from the program.

48 | (b) The office shall establish application timelines and
 49 | determine the schedule for disbursing scholarship awards by
 50 | direct payment from early learning coalitions to providers.

51 (c) The early learning coalitions shall prioritize the
52 award of scholarships to children whose families are not
53 currently receiving, or on a waiting list for, a publicly funded
54 program providing part-time child care or early childhood
55 education services.

56 (d) The office shall establish criteria for early learning
57 coalitions to use to determine the amount of scholarship awards.
58 The total amount of a scholarship award, or the amount of a
59 scholarship award in combination with any other public funds
60 received to provide part-time child care or early childhood
61 education, may not exceed the provider's published private pay
62 rate for the appropriate level of care. Scholarship funds may
63 not be used to supplant any federal funding received by the
64 program to provide services for the child.

65 (e) The office shall include a report on program
66 implementation and progress in the report required under s.
67 1002.82(5). The report must include, at a minimum, information
68 on the number and ages of children served and the total number
69 and amount of scholarships awarded, the efficiency and
70 effectiveness of program administration, and the impact on
71 kindergarten readiness.

72 (5) PROVIDER ELIGIBILITY.—

73 (a) A provider is eligible to receive scholarship funds if
74 the provider is:

75 1. Authorized under s. 1002.55 and meets the minimum

76 | kindergarten readiness rate as determined under s. 1002.69(6);
 77 | or

78 | 2. Authorized under s. 1002.88 and demonstrates acceptable
 79 | performance on the program assessment under s. 1002.82(2)(n).

80 | (b) A provider contracted for both the Voluntary
 81 | Prekindergarten Education Program and the school readiness
 82 | program must meet both criteria under subparagraphs (a)1. and 2.

83 | (6) LIABILITY.—The state is not liable for the award of
 84 | funds or any use of awarded funds under this section.

85 | (7) RULES.—The office shall adopt rules to administer this
 86 | section.

87 | Section 2. This act shall take effect July 1, 2021.