

1 A bill to be entitled
2 An act relating to child welfare; amending s. 39.524,
3 F.S.; requiring the Department of Children and
4 Families to provide specified assessment data to the
5 Legislature as part of a certain annual report
6 relating to the commercial sexual exploitation of
7 children; requiring the department to maintain certain
8 related data in a specified format; amending s.
9 402.402, F.S.; requiring the department to develop a
10 child protective investigator and case manager
11 recruitment program for a specified purpose;
12 specifying requirements for the program; specifying
13 duties of the department under the program, to be
14 completed in collaboration with community-based care
15 lead agencies; authorizing the department to adopt
16 rules to implement the program; amending s. 409.996,
17 F.S.; subject to an appropriation and beginning on a
18 specified date, requiring the department to develop a
19 4-year pilot program for treatment foster care;
20 requiring the department to implement the pilot
21 program by a specified date; limiting participation in
22 the pilot program to children meeting specified
23 criteria; requiring the department to identify two
24 judicial circuits determined to have the greatest need
25 for implementation of such pilot program; requiring

26 | the department to arrange for an independent
27 | evaluation of the pilot program to make specified
28 | determinations; requiring the department to establish
29 | certain minimum standards for the pilot program;
30 | requiring the department, by a specified date, to
31 | submit a final report to the Governor and the
32 | Legislature which includes specified evaluations,
33 | findings, and recommendations; requiring the
34 | department to convene a case management workforce
35 | workgroup by a specified date; providing for
36 | membership of the work group; specifying duties of the
37 | workgroup, to be completed in collaboration with the
38 | Florida Institute for Child Welfare; providing for
39 | meetings of the workgroup; providing for the operation
40 | of the workgroup until a specified date; requiring the
41 | workgroup to draft and submit a report to the Governor
42 | and the Legislature by a specified date; providing
43 | requirements for the report; requiring the department
44 | to contract for a detailed study of bed capacity for
45 | residential treatment services for child victims of
46 | commercial sexual exploitation; requiring that the
47 | study be completed by a specified date; providing
48 | requirements for the study; providing effective dates.

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50 | Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

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Section 1. Subsection (3) of section 39.524, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

39.524 Safe-harbor placement.—

(3) (a) By October 1 of each year, the department, with information from community-based care agencies, shall report to the Legislature on the prevalence of ~~child~~ commercial sexual exploitation of children; the specialized services provided and placement of such children; the local service capacity assessed pursuant to s. 409.1754; the placement of children in safe houses and safe foster homes during the year, including the criteria used to determine the placement of children; the number of children who were evaluated for placement; the number of children who were placed based upon the evaluation; the number of children who were not placed; and the department's response to the findings and recommendations made by the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability in its annual study on commercial sexual exploitation of children, as required by s. 409.16791. The department shall also provide to the Legislature the redacted assessments for children who are assessed for placement in safe houses or safe foster homes.

(b) The department shall maintain individual-level data of all children assessed for placement in a safe house or safe foster home and use this data to produce information that specifies ~~specifying~~ the number of children who were verified as

76 victims of commercial sexual exploitation, who were referred to
77 nonresidential services in the community, who were placed in a
78 safe house or safe foster home, and who were referred to a safe
79 house or safe foster home for whom placement was unavailable,
80 and shall identify the counties in which such placement was
81 unavailable. The department shall include this data in its
82 report under this subsection so that the Legislature may
83 consider this information in developing the General
84 Appropriations Act. The department shall maintain collected
85 individual-level data in a format that allows for extraction and
86 analysis of anonymized individual-level and aggregate data upon
87 request by the Legislature.

88 **Section 2. Subsections (4) and (5) of section 402.402,**
89 **Florida Statutes, are renumbered as subsections (5) and (6),**
90 **respectively, and a new subsection (4) is added to that section,**
91 **to read:**

92 402.402 Child protection and child welfare personnel;
93 attorneys employed by the department.—

94 (4) RECRUITMENT PROGRAM.—The department shall develop and
95 implement a child protective investigator and case manager
96 recruitment program for the purpose of recruiting individuals
97 who have previously held public safety and service positions,
98 such as former law enforcement officers, first responders,
99 military servicemembers, teachers, health care practitioners,
100 and emergency management professionals. This recruitment program

101 must focus on the education and recruitment of individuals who
102 have held positions of public trust and who wish to further
103 serve their communities as child welfare personnel.

104 (a) The department, in collaboration with community-based
105 care lead agencies, shall:

106 1. Develop information pertaining to employment
107 opportunities, application procedures, and training requirements
108 for employment within the child welfare system and distribute
109 such information to individuals who have previously held public
110 safety and service positions.

111 2. Develop and implement an employment referral system
112 with lead agencies for the case management population.

113 3. Collect the following information quarterly:

114 a. The total number of individuals who sought information
115 from the program; were hired by the department as child
116 protective investigators; were referred by the program to a lead
117 agency for case management positions; and, based upon a referral
118 by the program, were hired by the lead agency as a case manager.

119 b. The overall turnover rate for child protective
120 investigators and case managers compared to the turnover rate
121 for child protective investigators and case managers hired based
122 upon this program.

123 (b) The department may adopt rules to implement this
124 subsection.

125 **Section 3. Subsection (27) is added to section 409.996,**

126 **Florida Statutes, to read:**

127 409.996 Duties of the Department of Children and
128 Families.—The department shall contract for the delivery,
129 administration, or management of care for children in the child
130 protection and child welfare system. In doing so, the department
131 retains responsibility for the quality of contracted services
132 and programs and shall ensure that, at a minimum, services are
133 delivered in accordance with applicable federal and state
134 statutes and regulations and the performance standards and
135 metrics specified in the strategic plan created under s.
136 20.19(1).

137 (27) (a) Subject to appropriation, beginning July 1, 2025,
138 the department shall develop a 4-year pilot program of treatment
139 foster care or a substantially similar evidence-based program of
140 professional foster care. The department shall implement the
141 pilot program by January 1, 2026.

142 (b) Participation in the pilot program is limited to
143 children who:

144 1. Are entering or continuing in foster care with high
145 resource indicators, as determined by the department. These high
146 resource indicators may include the potential for frequent
147 placement change due to current or past behavior or Department
148 of Juvenile Justice involvement;

149 2. Will require placement in foster care when the children
150 are discharged from inpatient residential treatment; or

151 3. Are identified for residential or group home care and
152 who, based on a determination by the department, could be placed
153 in a foster home with higher level interventions.

154 (c) The department shall identify two judicial circuits
155 within which the pilot program will be implemented. The
156 department shall use relevant removal and placement data to
157 identify areas with the greatest need for such a program.

158 (d) The department shall arrange for an independent
159 evaluation of the pilot program to determine whether:

160 1. The pilot program is maintaining children in the least
161 restrictive and most appropriate family-like setting near the
162 child's home while he or she is in department care.

163 2. There is a long-term cost benefit associated with
164 continuation and expansion of a treatment or professional foster
165 care program.

166 (e) The department shall establish standards for the pilot
167 program. Those standards must, at a minimum, ensure:

168 1. Placement of a child in a treatment foster care home is
169 intended to be a temporary holistic treatment option and may not
170 exceed 9 months. A one-time 3-month extension may be granted if
171 the department determines that the child is not ready for
172 discharge from treatment foster care at 9 months.

173 2. Development and implementation of specialized training
174 for treatment foster parents in care coordination, de-
175 escalation, crisis management, and other identified relevant

176 skills needed to care for children with high behavioral health
177 needs that cannot be or have not been met in traditional foster
178 care placements.

179 3. No more than two eligible children may be placed at any
180 time in a treatment foster care home.

181 4. At least one foster parent with specialized training is
182 available and dedicated to the care and treatment of placed
183 children.

184 5. A 24 hour on-call crisis person available to the child
185 and family to provide in-home crisis intervention and placement
186 stabilization services.

187 (f) By January 1, 2030, the department shall submit to the
188 Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the
189 House of Representatives a final report that includes the
190 independent evaluation, the department's findings and
191 evaluation, recommendations as to whether the pilot program
192 should be continued and expanded statewide and, if so, fiscal
193 and policy recommendations to ensure effective expansion and
194 continued operation of the program.

195 **Section 4.** Effective upon this act becoming a law, the
196 Department of Children and Families shall convene a case
197 management workforce workgroup by July 1, 2025. The workgroup
198 shall be composed of persons with subject-matter expertise in
199 case management and child welfare policy.

200 (1) The department shall ensure the workgroup has at least

201 two representatives with subject matter expertise in case
202 management from each of the following:

203 (a) The Department of Children and Families.

204 (b) Community-based care lead agencies.

205 (c) Contracted case management organizations.

206 (2) In collaboration with the Florida Institute for Child
207 Welfare, the workgroup shall do all of the following:

208 (a) Review and analyze existing statutes, rules, operating
209 procedures, and federal requirements relating to the provision
210 of case management.

211 (b) Review and analyze legislative changes relating to
212 case management processes during the preceding 10 years and the
213 impact that those changes have had on workload and workforce.

214 (c) Gather statewide data to assess all of the following:

215 1. Compliance with statutory requirements.

216 2. Variations in case management practices.

217 3. Current workforce capacity.

218 4. Barriers to successful implementation of any statutes,
219 rules, and operating procedures.

220 (d) Solicit insight from stakeholders, including frontline
221 workers, supervisors, and administrators regarding challenges
222 and potential solutions.

223 (e) Analyze findings of the work conducted under
224 paragraphs (a)-(d) to:

225 1. Identify any needed statutory changes.

226 2. Evaluate whether the current structure, processes, and
227 requirements of statute, rule, and operating procedure are
228 duplicative or unworkable.

229 3. Evaluate how effectively case managers are implementing
230 policy.

231 (f) Develop clear and actionable recommendations to
232 streamline, clarify, standardize, and implement case management
233 processes and practices that address workforce retention and
234 allow for local community innovation.

235 (3) The workgroup shall meet as often as necessary to
236 carry out these duties and responsibilities and shall operate
237 until December 1, 2025, by which time it shall submit to the
238 Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the
239 House of Representatives a report that summarizes its work,
240 describes and details its analysis of data, and recommends clear
241 actionable policy.

242 **Section 5.** Effective upon this act becoming a law, the
243 Department of Children and Families shall contract for a
244 detailed study of bed capacity for residential treatment
245 services for child victims of commercial sexual exploitation
246 identified by the child welfare systems of care and those not
247 involved in the child welfare systems of care. The study must
248 include analyses of current capacity, current and projected
249 future demand, and this state's current and projected future
250 ability to meet that demand. The study must be completed by

251 December 31, 2025, and, at a minimum, include all of the
252 following:

253 (1) By department region, the current number of
254 residential treatment beds in safe homes for treatment of child
255 victims of commercial sexual exploitation, the number of
256 individuals admitted and discharged annually, the types and
257 frequency of diagnoses, and the lengths of stays.

258 (2) By department region, the current number of
259 specialized safe therapeutic foster home placements for child
260 victims of commercial sexual exploitation, the number of
261 placements annually, and the lengths of stays.

262 (3) Policy recommendations for ensuring sufficient bed
263 capacity for residential treatment beds and specialized safe
264 therapeutic foster home placements, and enhancing services for
265 child victims of commercial sexual exploitation which could
266 prevent the need for residential treatment beds.

267 **Section 6.** Except as otherwise expressly provided in this
268 act and except for this section, which shall take effect upon
269 this act becoming a law, this act shall take effect July 1,
270 2025.