

By the Committee on Children, Families, and Elder Affairs

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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; requiring the department
22 to implement and operate the pilot program and
23 coordinate with community-based care lead agencies for
24 specified purposes; requiring community-based care
25 lead agencies to work with the department in
26 recruiting licensed providers and identifying eligible
27 participants in the program; limiting participation in
28 the pilot program to children meeting specified
29 criteria; requiring the department to identify two

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30 judicial circuits determined to have the greatest need
31 for implementation of such a program; requiring the
32 department to arrange for an independent evaluation of
33 the pilot program to make specified determinations;
34 requiring the department to establish certain minimum
35 standards for the pilot program; requiring the
36 department, by a specified date, to submit a final
37 report to the Governor and the Legislature which
38 includes specified evaluations, findings, and
39 recommendations; requiring the department to convene a
40 case management workforce workgroup by a specified
41 date; providing for membership of the workgroup;
42 specifying duties of the workgroup, to be completed in
43 collaboration with the Florida Institute for Child
44 Welfare; providing for meetings of the workgroup;
45 providing for the operation of the workgroup until a
46 specified date; requiring the workgroup to draft and
47 submit a report to the Governor and the Legislature by
48 a specified date; providing requirements for the
49 report; requiring the department to contract for a
50 detailed study of certain services for child victims
51 of commercial sexual exploitation; requiring that the
52 study be completed by a specified date; providing
53 requirements for the study; providing effective dates.

54
55 Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

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

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59 39.524 Safe-harbor placement.-

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

77 (b) The department shall maintain individual-level data of
78 all children assessed for placement in a safe house or safe
79 foster home and use this data to produce information that
80 specifies ~~specifying~~ the number of children who were verified as
81 victims of commercial sexual exploitation, who were referred to
82 nonresidential services in the community, who were placed in a
83 safe house or safe foster home, and who were referred to a safe
84 house or safe foster home for whom placement was unavailable,
85 and shall identify the counties in which such placement was
86 unavailable. The department shall include this data in its
87 report under this subsection so that the Legislature may

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88 consider this information in developing the General
89 Appropriations Act. The department shall maintain collected
90 individual-level data in a format that allows for extraction and
91 analysis of anonymized individual-level and aggregate data upon
92 request by the Legislature.

93 Section 2. Present subsections (4) and (5) of section
94 402.402, Florida Statutes, are redesignated as subsections (5)
95 and (6), respectively, and a new subsection (4) is added to that
96 section, to read:

97 402.402 Child protection and child welfare personnel;
98 attorneys employed by the department.—

99 (4) RECRUITMENT PROGRAM.—The department shall develop and
100 implement a child protective investigator and case manager
101 recruitment program for the purpose of recruiting individuals
102 who have previously held public safety and service positions,
103 such as former law enforcement officers, first responders,
104 military servicemembers, teachers, health care practitioners,
105 and emergency management professionals. This recruitment program
106 must focus on the education and recruitment of individuals who
107 have held positions of public trust and who wish to further
108 serve their communities as child welfare personnel.

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

111 1. Develop information pertaining to employment
112 opportunities, application procedures, and training requirements
113 for employment within the child welfare system and distribute
114 that information to individuals who have previously held public
115 safety and service positions.

116 2. Develop and implement an employment referral system with

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117 lead agencies for the case management population.

118 3. Collect the following information quarterly:

119 a. The total number of individuals who sought information
120 from the program; were hired by the department as child
121 protective investigators; were referred by the program to a lead
122 agency for case management positions; and, based upon a referral
123 by the program, were hired by the lead agency as a case manager;
124 and

125 b. The overall turnover rate for child protective
126 investigators and case managers compared to the turnover rate
127 for child protective investigators and case managers hired based
128 upon this program.

129 (b) The department may adopt rules to implement this
130 subsection.

131 Section 3. Subsection (27) is added to section 409.996,
132 Florida Statutes, to read:

133 409.996 Duties of the Department of Children and Families.-
134 The department shall contract for the delivery, administration,
135 or management of care for children in the child protection and
136 child welfare system. In doing so, the department retains
137 responsibility for the quality of contracted services and
138 programs and shall ensure that, at a minimum, services are
139 delivered in accordance with applicable federal and state
140 statutes and regulations and the performance standards and
141 metrics specified in the strategic plan created under s.
142 20.19(1).

143 (27) (a) Subject to appropriation, beginning July 1, 2025,
144 the department shall develop a 4-year pilot program of treatment
145 foster care, or a substantially similar evidence-based program

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146 of professional foster care. The department shall implement the
147 pilot program by January 1, 2026.

148 (b) The department shall implement and operate the pilot
149 program and coordinate with community-based care lead agencies
150 to develop a process for the placement of children in treatment
151 foster care homes and deliver payment to the licensed providers
152 operating the pilot treatment foster care homes.

153 (c) Community-based care lead agencies shall work with the
154 department to recruit individuals and families as licensed
155 providers and identify potential eligible children for placement
156 in the pilot treatment foster care homes.

157 (d) Participation in the pilot program is limited to
158 children who:

159 1. Are entering or continuing in foster care with high
160 resource indicators, as determined by the department. These high
161 resource indicators may include, but not be limited to, the
162 potential for frequent placement change due to current or past
163 behavior or Department of Juvenile Justice involvement; or

164 2. Are dependent and will require continued placement in
165 foster care after discharge from inpatient residential
166 treatment.

167 (e) The department shall identify two judicial circuits
168 within which the pilot program will be implemented. The
169 department shall use relevant removal and placement data to
170 identify areas with the greatest need for such a program.

171 (f) The department shall arrange for an independent
172 evaluation of the pilot program to determine whether:

173 1. The pilot program is maintaining children in the least
174 restrictive and most appropriate family-like setting near the

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175 child's home while they are in department care; and

176 2. There is a long-term cost benefit associated with
177 continuation and expansion of a treatment or professional foster
178 care program.

179 (g) The department shall establish standards for the pilot
180 program. Those standards must, at a minimum, ensure:

181 1. That placement of a child in a pilot treatment foster
182 care home is a temporary holistic treatment option and may not
183 exceed 9 months. A one-time 3-month extension may be granted if
184 the department determines that the child is not ready for
185 discharge from treatment foster care at 9 months;

186 2. Development and implementation of specialized training
187 for treatment foster parents in care coordination, de-
188 escalation, crisis management, and other identified relevant
189 skills needed to care for children with high behavioral health
190 needs that cannot be or have not been met in traditional foster
191 care placements;

192 3. No more than two eligible children are placed at any
193 time in a pilot treatment foster care home;

194 4. At least one foster parent with specialized training is
195 available and dedicated to the care and treatment of placed
196 children; and

197 5. A 24 hour on-call crisis person is available to provide
198 in-home crisis intervention and placement stabilization services
199 to the child and family.

200 (h) The department shall submit a final report by January
201 1, 2030, to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the
202 Speaker of the House of Representatives, including the
203 independent evaluation, the department's findings and

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204 evaluation, recommendations as to whether the pilot program
205 should be continued and expanded statewide, and, if so, fiscal
206 and policy recommendations to ensure effective expansion and
207 continued operation of the program.

208 Section 4. Effective upon this act becoming a law, the
209 Department of Children and Families shall convene a case
210 management workforce workgroup by July 1, 2025. The workgroup
211 shall be composed of persons with subject-matter expertise in
212 case management and child welfare policy.

213 (1) The department shall ensure the workgroup has at least
214 two representatives with subject matter expertise in case
215 management from each of the following:

216 (a) The Department of Children and Families.

217 (b) Community-based care lead agencies.

218 (c) Contracted case management organizations.

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

221 (a) Review and analyze existing statutes, rules, operating
222 procedures, and federal requirements related to the provision of
223 case management.

224 (b) Review and analyze legislative changes related to case
225 management processes during the preceding 10 years and the
226 impact that those changes have had on workload and workforce.

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

228 1. Compliance with statutory requirements.

229 2. Variations in case management practice.

230 3. Current workforce capacity.

231 4. Barriers to successful implementation of any statutes,
232 rules, and operating procedures.

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233 (d) Solicit insight from stakeholders, including frontline
234 workers, supervisors, and administrators, regarding challenges
235 and potential solutions.

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

238 1. Identify any needed statutory changes;

239 2. Evaluate whether the current structure, processes, and
240 requirements of statute, rule, and operating procedure are
241 duplicative or unworkable; and

242 3. Evaluate how well case managers are implementing policy.

243 (f) Develop clear and actionable recommendations to
244 streamline, clarify, standardize, and implement case management
245 processes and practices that address workforce retention and
246 allow for local community innovation.

247 (3) The workgroup shall meet as often as necessary to carry
248 out these duties and responsibilities and shall operate until
249 December 1, 2025, by which time it shall submit a report to the
250 Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the
251 House of Representatives which summarizes its work, describes
252 and details its analysis of data, and recommends clear
253 actionable policy.

254 Section 5. Effective upon this act becoming a law, the
255 Department of Children and Families shall contract for a
256 detailed study of bed capacity for residential treatment
257 services and a gap analysis of nonresidential treatment services
258 for child victims of commercial sexual exploitation identified
259 by the child welfare systems of care and those not involved in
260 the child welfare systems of care. The study must include
261 analyses of current capacity, current and projected future

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262 demand, and the state's current and projected future ability to
263 meet that demand. The study must be completed by December 31,
264 2025, and must, at a minimum, include all of the following:

265 (1) By department region, the current number of residential
266 treatment beds in safe homes for treatment of child victims of
267 commercial sexual exploitation, the number of individuals
268 admitted and discharged annually, the types and frequency of
269 diagnoses, and the lengths of stays.

270 (2) By department region, the current number of specialized
271 safe therapeutic foster home placements for child victims of
272 commercial sexual exploitation, the number of placements
273 annually, and the lengths of stays.

274 (3) By department region, an analysis of nonresidential
275 treatment services for child victims of commercial sexual
276 exploitation and the utilization of such services.

277 (4) Policy recommendations for ensuring sufficient bed
278 capacity for residential treatment beds, ensuring specialized
279 safe therapeutic foster home placements, and enhancing services
280 for child victims of commercial sexual exploitation which could
281 prevent the need for residential treatment beds.

282 Section 6. Except as otherwise expressly provided in this
283 act and except for this section, which shall take effect upon
284 this act becoming a law, this act shall take effect July 1,
285 2025.