

By the Committees on Fiscal Policy; and Children, Families, and Elder Affairs

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A bill to be entitled

An act relating to child welfare; amending s. 39.524, F.S.; requiring the Department of Children and Families to maintain copies of certain assessments and tools used to assess children for certain placement; requiring the department to maintain certain data in a specified format; amending s. 402.402, F.S.; requiring the department to develop a child protective investigator and case manager recruitment program for a specified purpose; specifying requirements for the program; specifying duties of the department under the program, to be completed in collaboration with community-based care lead agencies; authorizing the department to adopt rules to implement the program; amending s. 409.996, F.S.; subject to an appropriation and beginning on a specified date, requiring the department to develop a 4-year pilot program for treatment foster care; requiring the department to implement the pilot program by a specified date; requiring the department to implement and operate the pilot program and coordinate with community-based care lead agencies for specified purposes; requiring community-based care lead agencies to work with the department in recruiting licensed providers and identifying eligible participants in the program; limiting participation in the pilot program to children meeting specified criteria; requiring the department to identify two judicial circuits determined to have the greatest need for

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implementation of such a program; requiring the department to arrange for an independent evaluation of the pilot program to make specified determinations; requiring the department to establish certain minimum standards for the pilot program; requiring the department, by a specified date, to submit a final report to the Governor and the Legislature which includes specified evaluations, findings, and recommendations; requiring the department to convene a case management workforce workgroup by a specified date; providing for membership of the workgroup; specifying duties of the workgroup, to be completed in collaboration with the Florida Institute for Child Welfare; providing for meetings of the workgroup; providing for the operation of the workgroup until a specified date; requiring the workgroup to submit a report to the Governor and the Legislature by a specified date; providing requirements for the report; requiring the department to contract for a detailed study of certain services for child victims of commercial sexual exploitation; requiring that the study be completed by a specified date; providing requirements for the study; providing appropriations; providing effective dates.

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

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

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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; and must also maintain a copy of any paper-based assessments or tools used to assess a child for such placement, to be provided upon request of the Legislature.

(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 victims of commercial sexual exploitation, who were referred to nonresidential services in the community, who were placed in a safe house or safe foster home, and who were referred to a safe house or safe foster home for whom placement was unavailable, and shall identify the counties in which such placement was unavailable. The department shall include this data in its 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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evaluation, recommendations as to whether the pilot program should be continued and expanded statewide, and, if so, fiscal and policy recommendations to ensure effective expansion and continued operation of the program.

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

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

(a) The Department of Children and Families.

(b) Community-based care lead agencies.

(c) Contracted case management organizations.

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

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

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

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

1. Compliance with statutory requirements.

2. Variations in case management practice.

3. Current workforce capacity.

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

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

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

1. Identify any needed statutory changes;

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

3. Evaluate how well case managers are implementing policy.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Section 6. For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the sum of \$3 million in recurring funds from the General Revenue Fund is appropriated to the Department of Children and Families to develop and implement the Treatment Foster Care Pilot Program established in s. 409.996(27), Florida Statutes, as created by this act.

Section 7. For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the sums of \$100,000 in recurring funds and \$200,000 in nonrecurring funds from the General Revenue Fund are appropriated to the Department

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291 of Children and Families to develop and implement the Child
292 Protective Investigator and Case Manager Recruitment Program
293 established in s. 402.402(4), Florida Statutes, as created by
294 this act.

295 Section 8. Except as otherwise expressly provided in this
296 act and except for this section, which shall take effect upon
297 this act becoming a law, this act shall take effect July 1,
298 2025.