

1 A bill to be entitled
2 An act relating to the Early Childhood Court program;
3 creating s. 39.01304, F.S.; providing legislative
4 findings and intent; defining terms; requiring the
5 Office of the State Courts Administrator, by a
6 specified date, to verify the existence of an Early
7 Childhood Court Program at certain circuit courts;
8 requiring the office to coordinate with the
9 appropriate circuit court to employ and train a
10 community coordinator for each program site;
11 authorizing the office to hire a statewide community
12 coordinator; requiring the Florida State University
13 Center for Prevention and Early Intervention Policy to
14 hire a statewide clinical consultant and assemble a
15 clinical oversight team for specified purposes;
16 establishing the primary goal of the program and the
17 means of achieving the goal; requiring that the
18 program be modeled on a specified approach for
19 specified purposes; requiring the program to
20 incorporate specified core components; requiring the
21 office, in partnership with the center and within
22 appropriated funds, to provide training to program
23 court teams; requiring the Florida Institute for Child
24 Welfare to conduct an evaluation of the program's
25 impact in consultation with the Department of Children

26 and Families, the office, the center, and a specified
27 organization; requiring the evaluation to include
28 certain data and recommendations; requiring the
29 institute to submit the results of its evaluation to
30 the Governor, the Legislature, and the Office of
31 Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability
32 by a specified date; requiring the institute to submit
33 annual reports; providing an effective date.

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

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37 Section 1. Section 39.01304, Florida Statutes, is created
38 to read:

39 39.01304 Early Childhood Court program.-

40 (1) LEGISLATIVE FINDINGS AND INTENT.-

41 (a) The Legislature finds that a child's first 1,000 days
42 of life are a critical period during which he or she faces
43 either the greatest risk of having to endure lifelong adversity
44 or the greatest opportunity for long-term well-being with a
45 stable nurturing caregiver.

46 (b) The Legislature also finds it is important to identify
47 evidence-based practices and developmentally appropriate
48 strategies to mitigate the impact of trauma on young children
49 placed in the state's dependency system and to improve outcomes
50 for them and their families.

51 (c) The Legislature further finds positive results
52 associated with the Safe Babies Court Team approach, advanced by
53 the national ZERO TO THREE nonprofit organization, which
54 achieves timely permanency, increases a child's well-being, and
55 greatly reduces recurrence of child abuse through the
56 development and use of specialized dockets, multidisciplinary
57 teams, and a nonadversarial approach in connection with
58 dependency proceedings.

59 (d) It is the intent of the Legislature to provide
60 resources to expand upon the existing specialized Early
61 Childhood Court dockets to ensure their adherence to the Safe
62 Babies Court Team approach. The Legislature also seeks to assess
63 the potential benefits to Florida's children and families from
64 adopting this approach, and determine whether expansion of the
65 Early Childhood Courts concept in this state is warranted.

66 (2) DEFINITIONS.—As used in this section, the term:

67 (a) "Community coordinator" means an individual who works
68 with a judge presiding over an Early Childhood Court, who
69 supports the activities of the court, and who facilitates
70 coordination and collaboration among the members of the Early
71 Childhood Court team.

72 (b) "Early Childhood Court" means a program that has a
73 specialized court docket created under this section which is
74 modeled after the national ZERO TO THREE Safe Babies Court Team
75 approach and which addresses child welfare cases involving

76 | children under 3 years of age.

77 | (c) "Safe Babies Court Team" means a ZERO TO THREE
78 | community engagement and systems change initiative focused on
79 | improving how the courts, child welfare agencies, and related
80 | child-serving organizations work together to improve and
81 | expedite services for young children in out-of-home care.

82 | (d) "ZERO TO THREE" means the national nonprofit
83 | organization that informs, trains, and supports professionals,
84 | policymakers, and parents in efforts to improve and promote the
85 | health and development of children under 3 years of age.

86 | (3) PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT.—

87 | (a) By August 1, 2018, the Office of the State Courts
88 | Administrator shall verify the existence of an Early Childhood
89 | Court program at each circuit court site that established a
90 | specialized Early Childhood Court docket before July 1, 2018.
91 | Multiple program sites may exist in the same county. The Office
92 | of the State Courts Administrator shall coordinate with the
93 | appropriate circuit court to hire and train a full-time
94 | community coordinator at each Early Childhood Court program site
95 | that was verified pursuant to this paragraph, and may hire a
96 | statewide community coordinator to implement the program.

97 | (b) The Florida State University Center for Prevention and
98 | Early Intervention Policy shall hire a statewide clinical
99 | consultant and assemble a clinical oversight team to ensure
100 | quality, accountability, and fidelity to the Early Childhood

101 Court model, including, but not limited to, training and
102 technical assistance related to clinical services, clinical
103 consultation and guidance for difficult cases, ongoing clinical
104 training for court teams, and training in child-parent
105 psychotherapy to expand clinical capacity and support of the
106 professional development of clinicians at each Early Childhood
107 Court program site.

108 (4) GOALS.—The primary goal of the Early Childhood Court
109 program is to improve outcomes of children under 3 years of age
110 in Florida's child welfare system by doing all of the following:

111 (a) Improving child safety and well-being.

112 (b) Addressing parents' trauma-related conditions and
113 associated issues, including, but not limited to, substance
114 abuse, mental health concerns, and family violence, and
115 repairing relationships between parents and their children.

116 (c) Achieving timely permanency.

117 (d) Preventing recurrences of maltreatment.

118 (e) Ending the intergenerational cycle of abuse, neglect,
119 and violence.

120 (5) CORE COMPONENTS.—The program shall be modeled after
121 the national ZERO TO THREE Safe Babies Court Team approach and
122 shall promote the adoption of its community engagement and
123 systems change initiatives to improve coordination between the
124 courts, child welfare agencies, and related organizations for
125 the benefit of children under 3 years of age placed in out-of-

126 home care. The program shall incorporate, but not be limited to,
127 all of the following core components of the Safe Babies Court
128 Team approach:

129 (a) An engaged and informed judge who leads the court team
130 in applying a therapeutic approach.

131 (b) A continuum of evidence-based mental health
132 interventions to address the parent-child attachment, to heal
133 trauma, and to promote healthy relationships.

134 (c) An Early Childhood Court community coordinator who
135 works with the judge to support Early Childhood Court
136 activities.

137 (6) TRAINING.—Within appropriated funds, the Office of the
138 State Courts Administrator, in partnership with the Florida
139 State University Center for Prevention and Early Intervention
140 Policy, shall provide training to the participating court teams
141 on meeting the program objectives.

142 (7) EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAM.—

143 (a) In consultation with the department, the Office of the
144 State Courts Administrator, the Florida State University Center
145 for Prevention and Early Intervention Policy, and the ZERO TO
146 THREE organization, the Florida Institute for Child Welfare
147 established in s. 1004.615 shall evaluate the impact of the
148 Early Childhood Court program on children and families in
149 Florida's child welfare system.

150 (b) The evaluation must include the analysis of data

151 collected by the Office of the State Courts Administrator and
152 measurable outcomes, including, but not limited to, the impact
153 of the Early Childhood Courts program on the future incidence of
154 maltreatment of children whose cases were heard in Early
155 Childhood Court, timely permanency, reunification of families,
156 and incidents of children reentering the child welfare system
157 whose cases were heard in Early Childhood Court. The evaluation
158 must provide recommendations as to whether and how the program
159 should be expanded, the projected costs of such expansion, and
160 projected savings to the state resulting from the Early
161 Childhood Courts program.

162 (c) The institute shall submit the results of the
163 evaluation to the Governor, the President of the Senate, the
164 Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the Office of
165 Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability by October
166 1, 2021.

167 (8) ANNUAL REPORTS.—By December 1, 2019, and December 1,
168 2020, the Florida Institute for Child Welfare shall provide
169 reports on the status of the program to the Governor, the
170 President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of
171 Representatives, and the Office of Program Policy Analysis and
172 Government Accountability.

173 Section 2. This act shall take effect July 1, 2018.