

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 director 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.

34

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

36

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, community coordinators, and early childhood mental health  
58 specialists who provide child-parent therapy to address the  
59 multigenerational trauma.

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

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

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

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

76 | approach and which addresses child welfare cases involving  
77 | children under 3 years of age.

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

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

87 | (3) PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT.—

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

98 | (b) The Florida State University Center for Prevention and  
99 | Early Intervention Policy shall hire a statewide clinical  
100 | director and assemble a clinical oversight team to ensure

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

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

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

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

117 (c) Achieving timely permanency.

118 (d) Preventing recurrences of maltreatment.

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

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

126 the benefit of children under 3 years of age placed in out-of-  
127 home care. The program shall incorporate, but not be limited to,  
128 all of the following core components of the Safe Babies Court  
129 Team approach:

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

132 (b) Licensed mental health specialists who are trained in  
133 Child-Parent Psychotherapy to heal trauma and help parents  
134 become invested in their child's safety and well-being and who  
135 play a prominent role in making recommendations to the judge and  
136 the team regarding family progress and permanency for the child.

137 (c) An Early Childhood Court community coordinator who  
138 works with the judge and the team to support Early Childhood  
139 Court activities.

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

145 (7) EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAM.—

146 (a) In consultation with the department, the Office of the  
147 State Courts Administrator, the Florida State University Center  
148 for Prevention and Early Intervention Policy, and the ZERO TO  
149 THREE organization, the Florida Institute for Child Welfare  
150 established in s. 1004.615 shall evaluate the impact of the

151 Early Childhood Court program on children and families in  
152 Florida's child welfare system.

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

165 (c) The institute shall submit the results of the  
166 evaluation to the Governor, the President of the Senate, the  
167 Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the Office of  
168 Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability by October  
169 1, 2021.

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

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