

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; making implementation of the program
 34 subject to an appropriation; providing an effective
 35 date.

36

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

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39 Section 1. Section 39.01304, Florida Statutes, is created
 40 to read:

41 39.01304 Early Childhood Court program.—

42 (1) LEGISLATIVE FINDINGS AND INTENT.—

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

48 (b) The Legislature also finds it is important to identify
 49 evidence-based practices and developmentally appropriate
 50 strategies to mitigate the impact of trauma on young children

51 placed in the state's dependency system and to improve outcomes
52 for them and their families.

53 (c) The Legislature further finds positive results
54 associated with the Safe Babies Court Team approach, advanced by
55 the national ZERO TO THREE nonprofit organization, which
56 achieves timely permanency, increases a child's well-being, and
57 greatly reduces recurrence of child abuse through the
58 development and use of specialized dockets, multidisciplinary
59 teams, community coordinators, and early childhood mental health
60 specialists who provide child-parent therapy to address the
61 multigenerational trauma.

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

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

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

75 (b) "Early Childhood Court" means a program that has a

76 specialized court docket created under this section which is
77 modeled after the national ZERO TO THREE Safe Babies Court Team
78 approach and which addresses child welfare cases involving
79 children under 3 years of age.

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

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

89 (3) PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT.—

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

100 (b) The Florida State University Center for Prevention and

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

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

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

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

119 (c) Achieving timely permanency.

120 (d) Preventing recurrences of maltreatment.

121 (e) Ending the intergenerational cycle of abuse, neglect,
122 and violence.

123 (5) CORE COMPONENTS.—The program shall be modeled after
124 the national ZERO TO THREE Safe Babies Court Team approach and
125 shall promote the adoption of its community engagement and

126 systems change initiatives to improve coordination between the
127 courts, child welfare agencies, and related organizations for
128 the benefit of children under 3 years of age placed in out-of-
129 home care. The program shall incorporate, but not be limited to,
130 all of the following core components of the Safe Babies Court
131 Team approach:

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

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

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

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

147 (7) EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAM.—

148 (a) In consultation with the department, the Office of the
149 State Courts Administrator, the Florida State University Center
150 for Prevention and Early Intervention Policy, and the ZERO TO

151 THREE organization, the Florida Institute for Child Welfare
152 established in s. 1004.615 shall evaluate the impact of the
153 Early Childhood Court program on children and families in
154 Florida's child welfare system.

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

167 (c) The institute shall submit the results of the
168 evaluation to the Governor, the President of the Senate, the
169 Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the Office of
170 Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability by October
171 1, 2021.

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

176 Representatives, and the Office of Program Policy Analysis and
177 Government Accountability.

178 (9) IMPLEMENTATION.—Implementation of the program is
179 subject to an appropriation provided by the Legislature in the
180 General Appropriations Act for that purpose.

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