

## Child Welfare Bills Roll

Governor Scott and the Florida Legislature have committed themselves to fixing the problems in Florida's child welfare system that have allowed so many children to die after the state has already in some form or fashion "touched" them.

Governor Scott has proposed adding \$42 million for additional child protective investigators and another \$8 million for sheriff's investigations.

On Wednesday, the Senate Children, Families and Elder Affairs Committee voted out three child welfare bills: [SB 1666](#), [SB 1668](#), and [SB 1670](#). Totaling 112 pages, these three bills are intended to work together to address the major problems facing the troubled child welfare system.

[SB 1666](#) (formerly SB 7072):

- requires 80 percent of newly hired child protective investigators and their supervisors to hold college degrees in social work. It would exempt them from paying tuition and fees for those credits and offer a loan reimbursement program as well;
- requires anyone who provides child welfare services and is employed by the DCF, a county sheriff's office, or a community-based care agency to earn and maintain a professional certification;
- creates the position of an assistant secretary of DCF with expertise in child welfare to act as the point person for the quality of child protection and child welfare services; and
- creates the Florida Institute for Child Welfare, a consortium of the state's public and private university social work programs to conduct research and policy analysis.

[SB 1668](#) (formerly SB 7074):

SB 1668 creates a new "Community-Based Child Welfare Care" section in law that substantially reorganizes community-based care and revises the responsibilities of both DCF and Community Based Care Lead Agencies (CBCs). In addition, it:

- requires that when siblings are removed from a home as the result of abuse, neglect, or abandonment, DCF must make every effort to keep them together and, if separated, to keep them in communication with one another and reunited as quickly as feasible, unless doing so would not be in the best interest of the children;
- requires DCF to report on its website basic facts relating to all deaths of children which occur in this state and which are reported to the DCF child abuse hotline;
- expands the DCF Relative Caregiver Program;
- requires that after a child in out-of-home care becomes 17 years of age the court must determine whether removal of the disability of nonage for the purpose of signing a



# Legislative Link

A legislative update provided by the United Way of Florida

residential lease, obtaining utilities, or establishing a bank account is in the child's best interest, and to remove those disabilities if doing so is in the child's best interest;

- expands the scope of child deaths to be reviewed by the statewide Child Death Abuse Review Committee from those determined to have been the result of child abuse or neglect to all child deaths reported to the DCF child abuse hotline; and
- creates an incident response team that would launch onsite investigations of child deaths or serious incidents and create an advisory committee to review each report.

## [SB 1670](#) (formerly SB 7076):

SB 1670 amends statutes to improve the care of medically complex children and encourage their continued placement in the home with appropriate services.

- defines "medical neglect";
- requires Child Protection Teams involved in cases alleging abuse, neglect, or abandonment of a medically complex child to consult with a physician with experience in treating that child's condition;
- requires DCF to work with the Department of Health (DOH) and the Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA) to provide care for medically complex children;
- allows children to be placed in medical foster homes and requires placement be made in the least restrictive, most nurturing environment;
- requires Medicaid managed care plans to provide defined information to DCF on children under DCF care; and
- requires services for medically complex children in their homes and communities to the greatest extent possible.

For additional information, please contact  
the United Way of Florida at: (850) 488-8276.

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