

Background Screening

Background

In 2010, the Florida Legislature adopted sweeping changes to Florida's background screening law, requiring thousands of prospective employees and volunteers to get state and federal background (Level 2) screenings before they can work or volunteer to work with vulnerable populations - children, the elderly and the disabled. The new screening requirements have caused significant problems for many employers, employees, volunteers, and nonprofits that use volunteers.

The 2011 Legislature passed CS/CS/SB 1992, which was intended to address some of the problems and set the stage for creating a comprehensive system that would hopefully eliminate most of the others. Among others, the bill exempted law enforcement officers and individuals related to a vulnerable person from the screening law. Also exempted were volunteers who assist on an intermittent basis for less than 20 hours of direct, face-to-face contact with a vulnerable person per month. In addition, the bill created a multi-agency workgroup charged with recommending a streamlined background screening system to address myriad issues such as fees/costs, timeliness, sharing of screening data among agencies, and much more.

Governor Scott vetoed CS/CS/SB 1992 because of concerns it might reduce protections for vulnerable populations. However, he did create a state agency Background Screening Workgroup to recommend how to address the problems that gave rise to the bill.

Point – Florida's history is rife with incidents of abuse and neglect of vulnerable populations, many of which would not have occurred if the perpetrators had been required to submit to a Level 2 background check. While there is no way to completely eliminate the danger to these potential victims, the state should maintain the strictest standards possible to minimize the risk of future abuse and neglect.

Counter Point – Background screening reform is not intended to water down the state's background screening requirements and reduce the level of safety Florida provides to vulnerable populations. Many reforms can be made that will reduce the burden of screening on volunteers and employers/employees while maintaining the highest possible standards. Creating a system that allows state agencies and employers to share screening results so employees and volunteers don't have to undergo new screenings every time they work or volunteer for a different agency, streamlining costs, standardizing screening criteria, reducing screening turn-around times, addressing fees/costs, etc. could result in major savings – in time, dollars, and availability of additional volunteers.

2012 Florida United Way Consensus Position

Florida's United Ways urge the 2012 Florida Legislature to create a comprehensive background screening system that will ensure the protection of vulnerable populations and not excessively burden volunteers, employers and employees or impede the ability of well-meaning volunteers and legitimate nonprofit agencies to provide critically needed assistance to people in their communities.

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

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Home and Community-Based Care for the Elderly

Background

The percentage of elders living in Florida is higher than any other state, with almost one out of every six Florida residents being 65 years old or older: 17.2 percent (3.3 million) of the state's 18.8 million residents. By 2030, that percentage is expected to swell to 27 percent.

The annual cost for nursing home care is between \$55,000 and \$75,000, and is increasing every year. As these costs outpace the ability of people to pay, less costly community-based alternatives have become more in demand.

The Florida Department of Elder Affairs reports that "Florida has provided alternatives to nursing home placement since 1982, with the goal of serving elders in the least restrictive settings. The state now operates six Medicaid home and community-based services waiver programs that help frail elders remain in their homes and other less restrictive settings for as long as possible, thereby enhancing their quality of life and avoiding costly nursing home placements." Two of these alternatives are Community Care for the Elderly and Home Care for the Elderly.

Community Care for the Elderly helps functionally impaired seniors live at home by providing personal care (help with bathing, dressing, etc.) home repairs, home-delivered meals, caregiver respite, care management, adult day care, emergency alert response, and medical transportation. Home Care for the Elderly helps Medicaid nursing home eligible seniors by providing a stipend of \$106 per month for home care, nutritional supplements, and incontinence products.

Point – While we should do our best to serve elders in the least restrictive manner and most cost effective way, we must recognize that as Florida attempts to rebound from the Great Recession, it must utilize scarce resources in a multitude of ways to stimulate the economy and address immediate critical needs. Those needs include skyrocketing Medicaid costs, a crumbling infrastructure, and other important public safety issues. All are needed to pull the state out of the economic doldrums, must be addressed immediately, and because a strong economy will benefit everyone – including the aged – must take precedence at this time over Community Care for the Elderly (CCE) and Home Care for the Elderly (HCE).

Counter Point – CCE and HCE not only allow seniors to maintain a higher quality of life, help them maintain their dignity, and employ thousands of Floridians, they also cost far less than nursing home care. Investing our resources in these services saves taxpayer dollars: Projections show that if the 2,987 seniors on the CCE waiting list who were placed into nursing homes at a cost of \$76 million in 2008 had instead been provided CCE services at a cost of \$18 million, taxpayers would have saved \$58 million. Likewise, the state would have saved \$7 million had the 298 seniors on the HCE wait list been provided HCE services costing \$1 million rather than being placed into nursing homes at a total cost of \$8 million.

2012 Florida United Way Consensus Position

Florida's United Ways urge the 2012 Florida Legislature to maximize funding for Community Care for the Elderly and Home Care for the Elderly.

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

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School Readiness

Background

In 2005, Florida's constitutionally mandated Voluntary Prekindergarten Program (VPK) was implemented to serve all four-year-olds whose parents want them to participate. Last year, the program served 165,240 four-year-olds at a total cost of about \$400 million, or \$2,562 per child during the school year and \$2,179 during the summer.

The 2011 Florida Legislature: 1) cut the program \$30 million, reducing per student spending to \$2,383 during the school year and \$2,026 during summer; 2) increased teacher-student and teacher-classroom ratios from 1:10 and 2:18 to 1:11 and 2:20, respectively; and 3) reduced VPK administration and program support (quality assurance, provider certification, eligibility determination) from 4.5 percent to 4 percent.

Florida's School Readiness Program provides subsidized child care for working families in poverty. The program prepares children for success in school through early learning opportunities as well as by involving parents as their child's first teacher, providing them with information on child development, and providing developmental screening for children and referrals to health and education specialists.

During the 2011-2012 year, the 2011 Florida Legislature did not restore \$27 million in non-recurring stimulus funds for school readiness and the federal government reduced TANF funding for school readiness by \$30 million, resulting in a total cut to school readiness programs of \$57 million.

Point – As Florida attempts to rebound from the Great Recession, it must utilize scarce resources in a multitude of ways to stimulate the economy and address immediate critical needs. Those needs include skyrocketing Medicaid costs, a crumbling infrastructure, and other important public safety issues. All are needed to pull the state out of its economic doldrums, must be addressed immediately, and must take precedence at this time over school readiness and VPK. A stronger economy will allow for a more robust investment in very important school readiness programs.

Counter Point – Florida's VPK Program is not the "high quality" program required by the constitution: It ranks 34th among 38 states in per pupil funding and meets only three of 10 nationally recommended standards. The 2011 funding cuts further reduce quality by requiring more children and fewer teachers in VPK classrooms and scaled-back quality improvement efforts.

Likewise, failure to adequately fund school readiness programs results in fewer children entering school prepared to succeed and thousands of our youngest children spending the work day in care that either does not enhance school success, or is detrimental to it.

The VPK and School Readiness Programs are two of the state's most important workforce and economic development programs. They allow hundreds of thousands of parents to attain and maintain employment, prepare children for success in the workplace, and themselves employ thousands of Floridians.

2012 Florida United Way Consensus Position

Florida's United Ways urge the 2012 Florida Legislature to provide greater access to high quality school readiness programs for Florida's children.

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

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