

HB 1268 -- EARLY CHILDHOOD HEALTH AND EDUCATION

SPONSOR: Berry

COMMITTEE ACTIONS: Voted "Do Pass" by the Standing Committee on Children and Families by a vote of 8 to 1. Voted "Do Pass" by the Select Committee on Social Services by a vote of 6 to 4.

This bill creates the Early Childhood Health and Education Act with the purpose of providing coordination and funding for early childhood health and education programs in Missouri. The bill requires the governing board of each county or city not within a county to appoint an early childhood health and education council, consisting of nine members, who must reside or work in the county or city not within a county. The governing board of each county or city not within a county may elect to pool funds and resources with other counties and form a multicounty district. The district must establish an early childhood health and education district council consistent with the requirements of the bill. Council members must be appointed as specified in the bill and must not receive compensation for their services, but may be reimbursed for their actual and necessary expenses. Each council must consist of:

- (1) One parent of a child under five years of age at the time of his or her appointment to the council;
- (2) One child care provider;
- (3) One health services provider;
- (4) One public school administrator;
- (5) One early childhood educator;
- (6) One member of the business community;
- (7) One representative of the faith community;
- (8) One representative of a philanthropic organization; and
- (9) One representative of the agricultural community.

The bill specifies the process for appointment and replacement of council members, the structure of the council, and requirements for surety bonds to be obtained by the council. Programs undertaken by the councils must accomplish one or more of the objectives specified in the bill. Each council must develop a plan for the expenditure, during the next fiscal year, of funds budgeted by the oversight committee to meet the needs identified by the council.

The plan must identify and prioritize the unmet need for early childhood development and health programs in its geographic boundaries. The council must submit its plan to the oversight committee by July 1 of each year, beginning in 2017 and councils must consider grant proposals to implement the plan. The bill permits the council to contract with a third party grant administrator to meet the requirements of these provisions and each council must publicize the grants permitted by the plan in the community and encourage the submission of grant proposals from public and private entities in the region for programs to achieve the goals of the plan.

The council must make certain considerations when evaluating grant program proposals, as specified in the bill, and grant proposals seeking funding from the council must include certain requirements specified in the bill. Within 45 days of the end of the grant period, all grant recipients must provide the specified information in a form prescribed by the oversight committee and the council must forward that information to the oversight committee within 10 business days of receipt of the information. The oversight committee may request additional information from councils or grant recipients about the funded programs and all council records and grantee records must be subject to review by the oversight committee at its discretion at any time during the period that funding is provided and for five years after the funding or grant period has ended. The operations of the council and grant recipients must be subject to an independent audit at the discretion of the oversight committee at any time during the period funding is provided and for five years after the grant period has ended.

This bill creates the Early Childhood Health and Education Trust Fund in the state treasury. The bill specifies how the fund must be used and how revenues in the fund must be distributed.

In addition to its other duties, the oversight committee must:

(1) Prepare an annual report describing the activities of the oversight committee and a description of outcomes for children and families achieved by the oversight committee, councils, and grant recipients. The oversight committee must submit the report to the Governor, the President Pro Tem of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives on or before January 15 of each year, beginning in 2019, and must provide a copy of this report to the Secretary of State;

(2) Administer the distribution of funds as provided in these provisions; and

(3) Provide technical assistance to each council established in the bill.

The bill requires the oversight committee and each council established by these provisions to be considered a public governmental body, subject to the provisions of Chapter 610, RSMo, and an audit by the State Auditor.

PROPOSERS: Supporters say that the goal is to provide coordinated funding for early childhood health and education programs. The bill defines early childhood as prekindergarten. The bill is trying to put together the correct governing process so that if the cigarette tax is increased, the money would flow down to these boards. The bill is setting up a governing process now to be prepared in the event funding via an increased cigarette tax occurs. The bill gives governing councils more local control to address situations in that locale. Current programs such as prekindergarten, parents as teachers, and head start are great but lack services and resources. Missouri doesn't sufficiently fund early childhood services currently so the bill does not create any fund swapping issue. Supporters want funding based on per-capita kids ages 0 through 5 to address concerns that all of the currently available funding for similar services goes to Kansas City and Saint Louis. Under the bill, local governing boards decide what their local community needs are, so if they need more funding for parents as teachers, the boards can increase its funding. The bill allows each county to leverage their resources and make the changes they need in that area.

Testifying for the bill were Representative Berry; Alliance For Childhood Education; Missouri Children's Leadership Council; City of Kansas City; and School Administrators Coalition.

OPPONENTS: There was no opposition voiced to the committee.