

## HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STAFF ANALYSIS

**BILL #:** HB 1055 Child Protection

**SPONSOR(S):** Harrell

**TIED BILLS:** **IDEN./SIM. BILLS:**

REFERENCE	ACTION	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR or BUDGET/POLICY CHIEF
1) Children, Families & Seniors Subcommittee		Tuszynski	Brazzell
2) Civil Justice Subcommittee			
3) Health Care Appropriations Subcommittee			
4) Health & Human Services Committee			

### SUMMARY ANALYSIS

A child protection team (CPT) is a medically directed, multidisciplinary team that works with local sheriff's offices and the Department of Children and Families (DCF) in cases of child abuse and neglect to supplement investigation activities. Child protection teams provide expertise in evaluating alleged child abuse and neglect, assessing risk and protective factors, and providing recommendations for interventions to protect children.

The bill:

- Amends s. 39.303, F.S., to require the Statewide Medical Director for Child Protection and district CPT medical directors to hold certain licenses and certifications.
- Adds "a member of a child protection team, as defined in s. 39.01, when carrying out his or her duties as a team member" to the definition of "Officer, employee, or agent" for the purposes of sovereign immunity.
- Requires the inclusion of the local child protection team medical director on any Critical Incident Rapid Response Team initiated by DCF to conduct investigations of certain child deaths or other serious incidents.
- Removes the ability for a physician not licensed in Florida to provide expert testimony in child abuse and neglect cases on mental injury using an "expert testimony certificate," but allows expert testimony if they are licensed under another state's corresponding law to chapter 458 F.S., or chapter 459, F.S.

The bill does not appear to have any fiscal impact on state or local governments.

The bill provides an effective date of July 1, 2015

## FULL ANALYSIS

### I. SUBSTANTIVE ANALYSIS

#### A. EFFECT OF PROPOSED CHANGES:

##### **Present Situation**

##### Child Protection Teams

A child protection team (CPT) is a medically directed, multidisciplinary team that supplements the child protective investigation efforts of local sheriff's offices and the Department of Children and Families (DCF) in cases of child abuse and neglect.<sup>1</sup> They are independent, community-based programs that provide expertise in evaluating alleged child abuse and neglect, assessing risk and protective factors, and providing recommendations for interventions to protect children and to enhance a caregiver's capacity to provide a safer environment when possible.<sup>2</sup> The Children's Medical Services (CMS) program in the Department of Health is authorized via statute to contract for these CPT services with local community-based programs.<sup>3</sup> There are 23 CPTs across the state providing services to all 67 Florida counties.<sup>4</sup>

Child abuse, abandonment and neglect reports to the central abuse hotline that must be referred to child protection teams include cases involving:

- Injuries to the head, bruises to the neck or head, burns, or fractures in a child of any age.
- Bruises anywhere on a child five years of age or younger.
- Any report alleging sexual abuse of a child.
- Any sexually transmitted disease in a prepubescent child.
- Reported malnutrition or failure of a child to thrive.
- Reported medical neglect of a child.
- A sibling or other child remaining in a home where one or more children have been pronounced dead on arrival or have been injured and later died as a result of suspected abuse, abandonment or neglect.
- Symptoms of serious emotional problems in a child when emotional or other abuse, abandonment, or neglect is suspected.<sup>5</sup>

##### Specialty Certification for Child Abuse Pediatrics

Child abuse pediatricians are responsible for the diagnosis and treatment of children and adolescents who are suspected victims of child maltreatment. This includes physical abuse, sexual abuse, factitious illness (medical child abuse), neglect, and psychological/emotional abuse. These specialty pediatricians participate in multidisciplinary collaborative work within the medical, child welfare, and law enforcement systems. They are also often called to provide expert testimony in court proceedings.<sup>6</sup>

The American Board of Medical Specialties approved the child abuse pediatrics specialty in 2006 and the American Board of Pediatrics issued the first certification exams in late 2009. Three years of full-time, broad-based fellowship training in child abuse pediatrics are required for fellows entering training on or after January 1, 2010.<sup>7</sup> Three-year child abuse fellowships are in various stages of development

<sup>1</sup> Florida Department of Health, Children's Medical Services. *Child Protection Teams* [http://www.floridahealth.gov/AlternateSites/CMS-Kids/families/child\\_protection\\_safety/child\\_protection\\_teams.html](http://www.floridahealth.gov/AlternateSites/CMS-Kids/families/child_protection_safety/child_protection_teams.html) (last visited March 10, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Id.

<sup>3</sup> Section 39.303, F.S.

<sup>4</sup> Children's Medical Services, *Child Protection Teams: CPT Statewide Directory*, available at <http://www.floridahealth.gov/alternatesites/cms-kids/home/contact/cpt.pdf> (last accessed March 12, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Id.

<sup>6</sup> Council of Pediatric Subspecialties. *Pediatric Child Abuse*, available at: <http://pedsubs.org/SubDes/ChildAbuse.cfm>. (last visited March 10, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> Child Abuse Pediatrics Certification, Eligibility Criteria for Certification in Child Abuse Pediatrics, available at <https://www.abp.org/content/child-abuse-pediatrics-certification> (last visited March 11, 2015).

at academic medical centers because of the new specialty designation. Most of them are housed within children's hospitals across the country, similar to other pediatric specialty fellowships, and will be comprised of both clinical and research training and a requirement for a scholarly project, which will help advance the field.<sup>8</sup> As of December 31, 2013, there were 324 child abuse pediatrics diplomates nationwide, including 12 in Florida.<sup>9</sup>

The State Surgeon General and the Deputy Secretary for Children's Medical Services, in consultation with the Secretary of Children and Families, have the responsibility for the screening, employment, and any necessary termination of child protection team medical directors, both at the state and district level.<sup>10</sup> There is currently no statutory requirement related to the qualifications of either the Statewide Medical Director for Child Protection or the district team medical directors. The Florida Administrative Code requires a district team medical director to be a licensed to practice in Florida, board certified in pediatrics, and interested in the field of child abuse and neglect with satisfactory completion of training deemed necessary by the Department of Health.<sup>11</sup>

### Sovereign Immunity

Sovereign immunity bars lawsuits against the state or its political subdivisions for the torts of officers, employees, or agents of such governments unless the immunity is expressly waived.

Article X, section 13 of the Florida Constitution recognizes the concept of sovereign immunity and gives the Legislature the power to waive such immunity in part or in full by general law. Section 768.28, F.S., contains the limited waiver of sovereign immunity applicable to the state. Under this statute, officers, employees, and agents of the state will not be held personally liable in tort or named as a party defendant in any action for any injury or damage suffered as a result of any act, event, or omission of action in the scope of her or his employment or function.

Instead, the state steps in as the party litigant and defends against the claim. The recovery by any one person is limited to \$200,000 for one incident and the total for all recoveries related to one incident is limited to \$300,000.<sup>12</sup> The sovereign immunity recovery caps do not prevent a plaintiff from obtaining a judgment in excess of the caps, but the plaintiff cannot recover the excess damages without action by the Legislature.<sup>13</sup>

However, personal liability may result from actions in bad faith or with malicious purpose or in a manner exhibiting wanton and willful disregard of human rights, safety, or property.<sup>14</sup>

Whether sovereign immunity applies turns on the degree of control of the agent of the state retained by the state.<sup>15</sup> In *Stoll v. Noel*, the Florida Supreme Court held that independent contractor physicians may be agents of the state for purposes of sovereign immunity. The court examined the employment contract between the physicians and the state to determine whether the state's right to control was sufficient to create an agency relationship and held that it did.<sup>16</sup>

The Stoll court explained that whether the Children's Medical Services (CMS) physician consultants are agents of the state turns on the degree of control retained or exercised by CMS. The manuals and guides given to physician consultants demonstrated that CMS had final authority over all care and treatment provided to CMS patients, and that CMS could refuse to allow a physician consultant's

---

<sup>8</sup> Giardino, A., Hanson, N., Hill, K.S. and Leventhal, J.M. Child Abuse Pediatrics: New Specialty, Renewed Mission. *Pediatrics* 2011; 128(1):156-159.

<sup>9</sup> American Board of Pediatrics, *Workforce Databook*, available at <https://www.abp.org/sites/abp/files/pdf/workforcebook.pdf> (last visited March 11, 2015).

<sup>10</sup> *Supra.* at FN 4.

<sup>11</sup> Rule 64C-8.002, F.A.C.

<sup>12</sup> S. 768.28(5), F.S.

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*

<sup>14</sup> S. 768.28(9)(a), F.S.

<sup>15</sup> *Stoll v. Noel*, 694 So. 2d 701, 703 (Fla. 1997).

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*

recommended course of treatment of any CMS patient for either medical or budgetary reasons.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, the court's conclusion was supported by the state's acknowledgement that the manual creates an agency relationship between CMS and its physician consultants, and despite its potential liability in this case, the state acknowledged full financial responsibility for the physicians' actions. The court stated that the state's interpretation of its manual is entitled to judicial deference and great weight.<sup>18</sup>

### Expert Testimony in Child Abuse Cases and Expert Witness Certificate

Section 458.3175, F.S., created the "expert witness certificate" requiring the Department of Health to issue a certificate to an expert witness who is licensed in another jurisdiction before that expert witness may testify in medical negligence cases or provide an affidavit in the pre-suit portion of a medical negligence case. The certificate is good for 2 years, and only authorizes the physician to do the following:

- Provide a verified written medical expert opinion; and
- Provide expert testimony about the prevailing professional standard of care in connection with medical negligence litigation pending in this state against a physician licensed in Florida.<sup>19</sup>

In criminal child abuse and neglect cases, s. 827.03(3), F.S., allows expert testimony in child abuse and neglect cases by physicians licensed under chapter 458 F.S. or 459 F.S., or by physicians who have obtained an expert witness certification under s. 458.3175, F.S.. Section 827.03(3)(b), F.S. requires, to provide expert testimony in mental injury in child abuse and neglect cases, physicians must be licensed under chapter 458 F.S. or 459 F.S. and have completed an accredited residency in psychiatry, or obtained an expert witness certification under s. 458.3175, F.S.

While s. 827.03, F.S., allows experts to testify in criminal child abuse and neglect cases if they have an expert witness certificate, s. 458.3175, F.S., only authorizes a very narrow enumerated use of this certificate and does not currently allow physicians to give expert testimony in child abuse and neglect cases.

### Critical Incident Rapid Response Team

The Critical Incident Rapid Response Team (CIRRT) was created by the Legislature in 2014. The CIRRTs are established within DCF to conduct investigations of child death or other serious incidents reported to the central abuse hotline if the child or another child in his or her home was the subject of a verified report of abuse or neglect within the previous 12 months.<sup>20</sup> The purpose of the CIRRT is to perform an immediate root-cause analysis of critical incidents and rapidly determine the need to change policies and practices related to child protection and welfare.<sup>21</sup>

Statute requires that the CIRRT be comprised of a multiagency team of at least five professionals with expertise in child protection, child welfare, and organizational management; a majority of the team must reside in judicial circuits outside the location of the incident.<sup>22</sup> It does not require a CPT member to be appointed to the CIRRT, although CPT members may be appointed to the CIRRT due to their expertise in child protection.

### **Effect of Proposed Changes**

#### Child Protection Teams

HB 1055 amends s. 39.303, F.S., to require the Statewide Medical Director for Child Protection to be:

---

<sup>17</sup> Id.

<sup>18</sup> Id.

<sup>19</sup> S. 758.3175(2), F.S.

<sup>20</sup> S. 39.2015(2), F.S.

<sup>21</sup> S. 39.2015(1), F.S.

<sup>22</sup> S. 39.2015(3), F.S.

- A licensed physician under chapters 458 or 459;
- A board-certified pediatrician; and
- A diplomate in the subspecialty of child abuse pediatrics from the American Board of Pediatrics.

The bill requires each district CPT medical director to be:

- A licensed physician under chapters 458 or 459;
- A board-certified pediatrician; and
- A diplomate in the subspecialty of child abuse pediatrics from the American Board of Pediatrics within 2 years after the date of his or her employment as district medical director; or
- Certified by Children's Medical Services as demonstrating specialized competence in child abuse.

### Sovereign Immunity

The bill amends s. 768.28(9)(b), F.S., adding a new subparagraph creating a parallel definition of "Officer, employee or agent," to include "a member of a child protection team, as defined in s. 39.01<sup>23</sup>, when carrying out his or her duties as a team member." This explicitly enumerates CPT members as falling under the sovereign immunity protections of the state.

### Expert Witness Certificate

The bill amends s. 827.03(2), F.S., to state that a physician may not provide expert testimony on mental injury in a criminal child abuse case unless licensed in Florida under chapter 458, F.S., or chapter 459, F.S., or the corresponding laws of another state. The bill removes the ability to use the "expert witness certificate" to provide expert testimony on mental injury in a criminal child abuse or neglect case.

### Critical Incident Rapid Response Team

The bill amends s. 39.2015, F.S., to require the inclusion of the local child protection team medical director on any CIRRT.

Lastly, the bill reenacts ss. 39.3031 and 391.026(2), F.S., to incorporate the amendments made by the bill.

The bill provides an effective date of July 1, 2015.

## B. SECTION DIRECTORY:

- Section 1:** Amends s. 39.2015(3), F.S., relating to critical incident rapid response team.
- Section 2:** Amends s. 39.303, F.S., relating to child protection teams.
- Section 3:** Amends s. 768.28, F.S., relating to sovereign immunity.
- Section 4:** Amends s. 827.03, F.S., relating to expert testimony in child abuse cases.
- Section 5:** Reenacts s. 39.3031, F.S., relating to rules for implementation.
- Section 6:** Reenacts s. 391.026(2), F.S., relating to powers and duties of the department.
- Section 7:** Provides for an effective date.

## II. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

### A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE GOVERNMENT:

#### 1. Revenues:

None.

<sup>23</sup> S. 39.01 defines a CPT as, "[A] team of professionals established by the Department of Health to receive referrals from the protective investigators and protective supervision staff of the department and to provide specialized and supportive services to the program in processing child abuse, abandonment, or neglect cases. A child protection team shall provide consultation to other programs of the department and other persons regarding child abuse, abandonment, or neglect cases."

2. Expenditures:

None.

B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

None.

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

The cost of obtaining the required child abuse pediatric subspecialty certification is unknown. The subspecialty certification requires a three-year fellowship.

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

None.

### III. COMMENTS

A. CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES:

1. Applicability of Municipality/County Mandates Provision:

Not Applicable. This bill does not appear to affect county or municipal governments.

2. Other:

None.

B. RULE-MAKING AUTHORITY:

The bill reenacts the relevant section of statute giving the Department of Health sufficient rule-making authority.

C. DRAFTING ISSUES OR OTHER COMMENTS:

The parallel definition of "Officer, employee or agent" created in s. 768.28(9)(b), F.S., could be integrated into the current definition without the need of a new subparagraph.

### IV. AMENDMENTS/ COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE CHANGES